

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS:

OR,

A PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT

OF THE

PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

IN THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

Search the Scriptures. John v. 39.

All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition. 1 Cor. x. 11.

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SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS;

VOLUME THE FIRST,

CONTAINING

THE PRINCIPAL HISTORIES

FROM ADAM TO JOSHUA INCLUSIVE,

TO
THE INHABITANTS
OF
THE PARISH OF ST. MARY, LEICESTER,
THESE
PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
ON
SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS,
ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED TO THEM
FROM THE PULPIT,
AND DESIGNED TO ENGAGE THEIR SERIOUS REGARD
TO
THE WORD OF GOD,
ARE NOW MOST AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY
THE AUTHOR;
AS
A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT FOR THEM,
AND OF HIS
ATTENTION TO THEIR WELFARE.

P R E F A C E.

AN introduction to a book may be so far useful, as it may explain the writer's intention, and enable others to pass a fair judgment upon his performance. For, unless his particular views be well understood and considered, it is probable, that he may be rashly censured for disappointing those hopes, which he could not have gratified, without departing from his plan. Some previous observations, then, may be proper in the present instance, to apprise the reader what he may expect.

The following practical reflections on Scripture Characters were originally drawn up for the instruction of a plain Congregation, and delivered to them in the form of Sermons: and to their use they are now more immediately dedicated. The Author, indeed, though with much diffidence, submits them to the public: and to this he has been induced by a desire to promote the profitable study of the word of God, among others, as well as among the people who are his peculiar charge. He presumes not to solicit the attention of critical readers, who are pleased with novelty of sentiment, literary remarks, or the embellishments of style and language. For such persons he does

not write; and therefore, were he capable of enriching his composition with those ornaments, which would have recommended him to their notice, he must have declined it, in order to be consistent with his own purpose. But he hopes that the serious enquirer after sacred truth, and the humble Christian, who, laying aside fruitless controversy, is anxious to advance his own spiritual edification, will hereby be instructed, confirmed, and comforted, "in the way of righteousness."

The design is, to point out the proper improvement of the inspired history, many parts of which may appear, to common readers, dry and uninteresting, and to offer such reflections upon the various occurrences, as a pious mind would wish to indulge. To this end, plainness of speech is studied, curious researches are avoided, nor is any new information aimed at, as being entirely foreign from the plan. Those doctrines, which have been generally received in the Christian Church, are taken for granted, and a practical application of them is addressed to persons of different descriptions. Neither the limits, nor the intent of the work, would have permitted a laboured defence of each truth, that is here advanced. And, perhaps, after all the controversial writings with which the world abounds, the important purposes of religion will be more effectually promoted by solemn and earnest exhortations, grounded on acknowledged principles, than by the most ingenious and solid arguments, in vindication even of the purest creed. The latter, indeed, may be highly useful, as conveying light to the understanding,

understanding, and conviction to the judgment; but the former, in general, have a more powerful influence upon the will and the affections, and are therefore more conducive to practice.

It is presumed, that the study of sacred Biography, as it engages the mind by the variety of remarkable incidents and characters, which it brings into view, will be attended with many peculiar advantages. The perfections and moral government of God are hereby displayed and demonstrated, while numerous and indubitable facts declare, what has been His conduct towards his creatures. The nature of man, which is here faithfully represented in different circumstances and relations, will be better understood, than by any speculative enquiries concerning it. The great plan of Redemption, also, will be more clearly exhibited, than by any dry system of doctrines: for here we shall see, in what manner, and by what steps, it was carried on from age to age, and to what extent the benefits of it have been received and enjoyed by the true servants of God. Nor is it the least considerable recommendation of this study, that it seems particularly calculated to promote self-knowledge. By looking at the excellencies of others, we are convinced of our own duty, and our sad declensions from it, much more forcibly than by the mere reading of precepts and directions. And while we are called upon to censure the baseness of “hypocrites and deceivers,” we are at the same time constrained to tremble for ourselves, to examine what resemblance we bear to them, and to beware of those temptations, by which they were seduced.

A publication

A publication of a similar nature and tendency*, with that which is here offered to the world, has lately appeared, and may be thought to render the present unnecessary. The Author, however, begs leave to observe, that he had laid his own plan, before he was apprized that any thing of a like kind was even under contemplation. And, though upon such information he did not desist from his purpose, he hopes that he shall not be considered as interfering in another's province, or as having the presumption to suppose, that this small attempt would supersede the performance alluded to. For, though that be a work of confessed merit, yet, if it be continued through the old and new testament on the same extensive scale, on which it is begun, it will not come within the purchase of many plain people, to whom in a more especial manner these practical exhortations are addressed.

A repetition of sentiment may be found in some parts of these essays; and this is scarcely to be avoided, while we are endeavouring to deduce useful instructions from the principal events recorded in the Scriptures. For, as we meet with similar occurrences in different periods of the sacred history, and as several of the characters, here delineated, bear a near resemblance to each other, the same thoughts will naturally offer themselves to the mind: nor ought they to be rejected, merely because they have been suggested upon a former occasion. Perhaps, at one time, a serious reflection may have a peculiar influence, and leave a strong impression, in

* Dr. Hunter's Sacred Biography.

favour of religion, which, at another, it might fail of producing.

Upon the whole, the Author is fully sensible, that he stands in much need of the candour of his readers, which he earnestly solicits. But for a firm and undisguised declaration of his sentiments, upon the doctrines of revelation, he begs no indulgence. Convinced as he is of their truth and importance, he most anxiously desires to recommend them to others; and he is not afraid to assert, that the principles he maintains, and the exhortations he delivers, so far as they are agreeable “to the law and to the testimony,” demand, and deserve, attention.

It is his ardent prayer, for all who shall peruse the following pages, that they may “receive the love of the truth,” and attain to such a knowledge of the holy scriptures, as will “make them wise unto Salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

C O N T E N T S.

Chap. I.	Sect. 1.	The character of Adam	- Page 1
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	15
Chap. II.	- - - - -	Sain & Abel	32
Chap. III.	- - - - -	Enoch	43
Chap. IV.	Sect. 1.	Noah	54
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	64
Chap. V.	Sect. 1.	Abraham	78
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	95
	Sect. 3.	- - - - -	110
Chap. VI.	- - - - -	Lot	131
Chap. VII.	- - - - -	Melchisedec	149
Chap. VIII.	- - - - -	Isaac	171
Chap. IX.	Sect. 1.	Jacob	194
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	217
Chap. X.	Sect. 1.	Joseph	242
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	263
	Sect. 3.	- - - - -	290
Chap. XI.	Sect. 1.	Job	303
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	325
Chap. XII.	Sect. 1.	Moses	343
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	367
	Sect. 3.	- - - - -	393
	Sect. 4.	- - - - -	420
Chap. XIII.	- - - - -	Pharaoh	445
Chap. XIV.	- - - - -	Balaam	469
Chap. XV.	Sect. 1.	Joshua	490
	Sect. 2.	- - - - -	519

SCRIPTURE CHARACTERS.

A D A M.

C H A P T E R I.

SECT. I.

The Scriptures of divine authority—instruct us by examples.—Adam, a remarkable character—created and appointed God's viceroy—bidden to eat of the tree of knowledge—received Eve—made in the image of God, as resembling Him in knowledge, holiness, and happiness.

THE holy scriptures are the gracious gift of God, an invaluable blessing vouchsafed to mankind. They carry with them indubitable marks of their divine original: and that they are “written by inspiration of God,” has been demonstrated “by many infallible proofs.” The attempts of infidelity, to overturn or weaken the evidence in their favour, have tended only to illustrate and confirm it. But while the outworks of Revelation are ably defended, it becomes every sincere enquirer to search out, with great diligence, the sacred treasures deposited therein. Here, alas! what negligence do we discover! As if it were enough

to know that the Bible is the word of God, we are willingly ignorant of all that it contains; or else we take up with some crude, undigested notions of divine things, which we have received merely upon trust. The truth, excellence, and importance of the scriptures are by most persons assented to, but, it is feared, few only, in comparison, are giving a serious and diligent attention to them.

An attempt, therefore, to excite men to search the scriptures for themselves cannot be needless, or unseasonable. This, indeed, is a study to which curiosity alone might prompt us. For we shall hereby become acquainted with knowledge the most sublime, and events, the most wonderful. But a far nobler motive than curiosity should recommend it to us. We are called to it by the highest authority; nor can we neglect it, without a manifest contempt of God, who, in that sacred book, makes known his will, and requires our unfeigned obedience. 'Can any thing be more interesting to us than these enquiries, "Who is the Lord?" and "What would he have me to do?" "May I not dread his anger?" or, "Is there any way, in which I may be restored to his favour?"—In these enquiries, so infinitely important to us, the Bible very fully resolves us. Without insisting, therefore, on the beauties of its language, the surprising facts it relates, the grandeur of its representations, and the sublimity of its doctrines, its highest recommendation is,—It is "the word of the living God," and is "able to make us wise unto Salvation."

With a very small degree of attention, we shall remark the particular method, by which the sacred volume conveys instruction. Much the greatest part of it is taken up with the records of history, and the description of remarkable lives. These are not to be carelessly passed over, as they frequently are, being supposed to be of little or no concern to us, merely because they are of ancient date. "They are written for our admonition," and it will be a suitable employment for us to examine, what benefit may be derived from them. We all know the force of example in common life; and there is no doubt, but the narration of striking facts, and the delineation of celebrated characters, may be of considerable advantage. Important truths are hereby conveyed to us in the most pleasing form; and a deep impression is made upon the mind, in favour of religion, such as no dry system of doctrines or precepts can produce.

To answer these valuable purposes, is the design of the present publication. Not merely for entertainment, but for "instruction in righteousness," it is intended to set before our readers the most interesting circumstances of those lives, which are most distinguished in the scriptures.

Years before
Christ, 4004. We begin, where mankind itself began,
with Adam. And here, if we give the
slightest attention to the history of our great
Progenitor, we shall be constrained to cry out, How
wonderful a character was this! What an astonishing
change did he experience in himself! What
amazing

amazing events did he see accomplished! In him, the perfection of human nature was displayed; and in him, it received that poisonous wound, which will infect his latest posterity. He saw the world in its glory; a delightful habitation, without spot or blemish: and he lived to see it despoiled of its beauty, overspread with violence, with sin, and misery, and, by his transgression, brought under the curse of God who made it. What abundant matter is here for serious and useful meditation! Let us lift up our prayer, that while we are contemplating "the first man," who was "of the earth, earthy," we may be led to the knowledge of "the Second Man, who is THE LORD FROM HEAVEN."

A variety of curious questions may be proposed, concerning both the creation and the fall of man. But where revelation does not resolve us, it becomes us to be silent, or to confess our ignorance. It may be useful to consider the character of Adam in his primeval beauty and dignity, that we may discover, how much we have lost by sin; and what destruction it has brought upon the earth: whence also it will appear, how needful, and how precious, is the Redemption which the SECOND ADAM has accomplished.

Our present condition is like that of a magnificent structure reduced to ruins. Enough is left to shew, that it was once exceedingly glorious. Here and there the remains of a stately pillar remind us of the original grandeur of this edifice*. But who can forbear weep-

* See an affecting description of the desolations of our nature, in Howe's Living Temple, Part II. Chap. 4.

ing over its ruins ! The heathens themselves concluded, some great change must have taken place in the nature and situation of man. However they might differ from each other as to the origin of evil, in this they were generally agreed, that man must have suffered some dreadful lapse, and could not have come out of the hands of his Creator, depraved as he now is. But revelation alone can inform us, how the change was effected ; and this is the history, with which we are presented in some of the first pages of the Bible. Most express and repeated are the declarations, that man was originally possessed of perfect holiness in his nature ; and a clear account is given of his fall from that happy state. “ God made man upright*,” “ God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him†.” But “ by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin : and so judgment came upon all men to condemnation‡.”

The earth, with its rich and beautiful furniture, was formed by the word of God, and prepared, like a splendid palace, for the reception of some great inhabitant, before Man, who was to exercise sovereign dominion in it, was brought into existence. He too, as well as the various orders of creatures, which were put under him, received his being immediately from God, the original and inexhaustible source of all life and blessedness. Not from any want of happiness in himself, not from any expectation that the whole universe of creatures could add any thing to him, but from

* Eccles. vii. 29, † Gen. i. 27. ‡ Rom. v. 12, 18.

a desire to communicate out of his own fulness of bliss, and to manifest his glory, the great Lord of all was pleased to call forth into being this lower world, every part of which he looked upon with approbation and delight, “and behold, it was very good.” Man was designed to be his Vicegerent, or representative upon earth: and to mark the dignity and excellence of this creature, above the rest, the Lord God proceeded, with a peculiar solemnity, to his creation. Other animals had been produced at once by the word of the Lord; but now, as if upon a matter of singular importance, a council is held among the persons of the Godhead*, to complete the grand work, and to form man upon earth. God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness†.” “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground‡.” Such was the origin of his body, “which is of the earth, earthy;” but to this a nobler part was joined, of a heavenly nature and extraction, which prove the superior excellency of the soul; “for the Lord breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”

Thus Adam, the great founder of our race, received his existence, in a manner very different from any of his posterity, immediately from the hand of God. Without passing through the weakness of infancy and childhood, he experienced at once all the vigour and perfection of manhood. Power and dominion were

* See Dr. Horsley's Charge, p. 49, and Dr. Kennicott's Dissertation on the Tree of Life, p. 29, 30.

† Gen. i. 26. ‡ ii. 7.

given him over all creatures upon the earth; but he was obliged, at the same time, to feel his own subjection. He was made under a law, which was, indeed, not a painful restraint, but his happiness and delight, during his state of innocence. In addition also to the moral law, some positive commands were imposed upon him.

The Sabbath was instituted for the worship of God; who, though every day was to be a day devoted to him, required that his service should be attended to, every seventh day, in a more immediate and solemn manner*. During the other six days of the week, labour and an attention to inferior concerns were enjoined even upon Adam in Paradise. "The Lord God put him into the garden of Eden, to DRESS it, and to KEEP it†."

There was one other particular precept, enforced by a tremendous sanction; but the observance was as easy, as the injunction was reasonable. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die‡."

Man was formed for society; and therefore, to promote his happiness, as well as to propagate the species, the Lord "made him an help-meet for him§." From this circumstance the church concludes, that "marriage is an honourable estate, being instituted of God in the time of man's innocency||."

Gen. ii. 3. † ii. 15. ‡ ii. 16, 17. § ii. 18.

|| Solemnization of Matrimony.

But, passing by other considerations concerning the state of man in Paradise, we fix our attention on that, which was his chief glory;—He was created IN THE IMAGE OF GOD.

It is enquired, wherein consisted this divine image, or likeness to the Godhead, which Adam possessed? Some understand it of an outward splendor or visible glory, that surrounded his body, and distinguished him as the favourite of heaven. We deny not, that there might be such a lustre as Moses had, when he came down from the mount of God*, or such as the bodies of saints will have at the resurrection of the just†. We have, probably, suffered by the fall, even in our external appearance, as we evidently have in our bodily strength. But this is not told us: nor would such a sense of “the image of God” come up to the strength of the expression; for the splendor that surrounds the Deity, whatever it may be, affords us the faintest idea of his perfection.

Others have supposed, that the image of God consisted in that power or dominion which God gave Adam over the creatures. That he was constituted lord of this creation, as God’s representative or vicegerent upon earth, we readily allow; but power or dominion answers not properly to God’s image, for then the greatest in power would most resemble God; which general experience contradicts‡.

We are led, therefore, to look for another sense; and it seems most proper to consider the divine like-

* Exod. xxxiv. 30.

† 1 Cor. xv. 43. Phil. iii. 21.

‡ See Dr. SOUTH, Vol. II. Sermon 2.

ness, in which Adam was created, as belonging to his better part, and descriptive of that perfection of his soul, that universal rectitude of all his faculties, by which, according to his measure and capacity, he was holy as God himself. This sense is confirmed by two passages of scripture, which speak of the restoration of believers in Jesus Christ to that divine likeness, which we lost in Adam. “That ye put on the new man, which AFTER GOD is created in righteousness and true holiness*.” “Ye have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, AFTER THE IMAGE OF HIM that created him †.”

We may consider Adam, thus possessed of his primitive glory, in three respects: . .

I. As to his knowledge.—The powers of his understanding were far superior to what we are acquainted with. Sin has brought darkness into the mind, and spread a dulness and stupidity over all its faculties. Adam had an insight into natural things, far beyond the acutest philosopher; as may be gathered from his giving names to all creatures, according to their different constitutions ‡. And it is probable his knowledge was more by intuition, than by long deductions in the way of reasoning. “He came into the world a philosopher, and, till his fall, he was ignorant of nothing but sin. All those arts and inventions, which vulgar minds gaze at, the ingenious pursue, and all admire, are but the reliques of an intellect defaced with sin and time: and certainly, that must needs

* Eph. iv. 24.

† Col. iii. 10.

‡ Gen. ii. 19, 20.

have been very glorious, the decays of which are so admirable*.”

But his knowledge of a moral kind was most excellent. He understood, more than any of his children, the nature and attributes of God; particularly what were his own obligations, and what that perfection of obedience, which was due to his Creator. There was then no need that the moral law should be written on tables of stone; it was written upon his heart, in fair and legible characters, so that in no instance could he be ignorant, what was required of him. He mistook not through prejudice, nor could he be unmindful of his duty through forgetfulness.

Is this our case? How far otherwise! How vain and presumptuous is the boast of knowledge and of reason in fallen man! Do we not observe, what ignorance of divine things prevails in the world! What darkness is spread over our own minds! “The world,” with all its improvements in science, and even in those places where learning has attained its highest eminence, “by its wisdom never knew God†.” For near six thousand years by far the greatest part of mankind have had no other religion than idolatry. And shall they boast of their understanding, who, when left to themselves, have run into the grossest absurdities, and the most abominable impurities, even in the concerns of religion? Let us learn, how low man has fallen; and what an universal necessity there is for a divine illumination!

* Dr. South.

† 1 Cor. i. 21.

II. As to his holiness.—Holiness is that attribute of the Godhead, which is its brightest glory; for it is this which the blessed spirits,* who cover their faces while they worship before the throne of God, chiefly celebrate, crying continually, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts!” And it is the principal consideration in Adam’s character, that he was “made upright, in righteousness and true holiness.”

1. His will, having no wrong bias, was perfectly conformed to the divine law. He was free to choose. Yet we cannot suppose, that he could look with indifference upon every object, as if right and wrong appeared equally eligible to him. But perceiving an excellency in whatever God approved, to this he was led with a sweet impulse of the mind; this he admired, this he chose. His understanding directed; his will cheerfully obeyed.

Ah! how different is it with all his posterity! Shall we boast of our goodness, when we uniformly choose that which is evil? Shall we pretend to real freedom, when, through the perverseness of our will, we are hurried away to that which we condemn, and our liberty is no better than licentiousness! What cause for humiliation! What need to pray, “Draw me, and we will run after thee!”

2. His affections were lively and vigorous in pursuing that which he approved. To obey God was his supreme delight; what he rejoiced in; as the angels, who, for their ardour in executing the divine commands, are compared to “a flaming fire.” Hope and fear, love and hatred, all united in exciting him
with

with cheerfulness to persevere in the service of his Maker. No refractory tempers proved any obstacle to his obedience; no stupidity or perverseness of mind damped his zeal.—Is it thus now? Do not our affections, which are earthly and sensual, prove that we are in a fallen state? Do we find the flame of sacred love always burning in our hearts? Are there no contending passions fighting for the mastery? Not to mention our backwardness to the service of God, and remissness in it, while we can be active and vigorous in the pursuit of every trifle; what a numerous catalogue of corruptions and vile abominations might be reckoned up!—Who does not pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God!” •

III. As to his happiness,—The Lord God is happy, because he is holy: the angels, who have never fallen, are so too. Thus likewise our great progenitor, while he stood in the image of God, possessed perfect felicity. How excellent his privileges!—Placed by divine appointment in Eden, the paradise of God, which was richly furnished for his accommodation, what could he want from without? He was made a little lower than the angels, and had all things in subjection under his feet. From within, too, what sources of blissful enjoyment! As he had no interruption of his peace from boisterous passions, how delightful must have been the tranquillity of his mind! But the grand source of his blessedness was, his close union and intimate acquaintance with God. It is the divine presence, which constitutes the fulness of joy in heaven; and it was this, which made paradise itself so pleasant an habitation.

But the divine inhabitant is fled; and man, having lost the image and the favour of God, is become a wretch indeed! Have we not continual experience of this truth? Alas! where is happiness now? Is it to be found in any situation of life, in any individual person, without the restoring grace of Christ? Wormwood and gall are mixed in our sweetest draughts: so that the misery, which overspreads this lower world, may constantly remind us, how very far we have departed from God.

The subject will suggest many practical reflections.

1. We may learn, upon a comparison with Adam, to be abased.—See, what was his glory; and how great is our shame! “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” Write his name **ICHABOD**; for “the glory is departed.” Let each one for himself consider his own exceeding great depravity, and join with righteous Job in this humiliating confession, “Behold, I am vile!”

2. We ought not to reject the gospel, as an unnecessary scheme. Inasmuch as all have equal need, let all thankfully embrace it. Let not the decent and the regular say to any the most profligate, “Stand off, I am holier than thou;” but let all apply to “the blood of sprinkling,” as being all equally undone, without the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Instead of presumptuously asking, Why was Adam suffered to fall? rather say, “Blessed be the Lord God, who hath raised up an horn of salvation for us.”

3. You, who have believed through grace, and are partakers of Christ, have abundant cause to rejoice in
your

your blessedness.—You are now in a measure restored to what Adam possessed; and yet a little while, and you will be happier than ever he was in an earthly paradise. Though for the present “you groan, being burdened,” learn to forget your griefs, in expectation of “the glory which shall be revealed in you.”

But let careless sinners consider, whose image they bear; how great is their misery now, and what a tremendous prospect is before them! So they may yet “flee from the wrath to come,” and escape the “fiery indignation that will devour the adversaries.”

A D A M.

SECT. 2.

Adam fell—the malignity of the offence—and its awful consequences, in his body, and in his soul—the sentence passed upon him—received a promise of the Saviour—involved his posterity in extreme misery, corruption, and condemnation—driven out of Paradise—died at the age of 930 years.

IMMEDIATELY after the creation, when God looked upon every thing that he had made, he pronounced it to be very good. But sin he did not make; though for wise purposes he has permitted it. Let none dare to cast the blame upon Him; since, from every view of his government, it must appear, that “a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he*.” This must be obvious, even while we are remarking the circumstances which attended the first entrance of sin among ourselves.

A glorious character of Adam in his original state has been delineated. The serious reader might wish, perhaps, to dwell upon the pleasing subject, and to continue longer in Paradise, to contemplate its beauty and excellency. But we are soon required to quit the delightful situation, and to survey the world in ruins. Behold the favourite of Heaven, the lord of the whole

* Deut. xxxii. 4.

earth, degraded from his dominion, debased lower than the brute creation, an outcast from God and happiness! What a change of scene is here! What an awful contrast to man in his primitive innocence! While we are witnesses to the disobedience and disgrace of our first parent, banished from Eden, who can help exclaiming, "Adam, where art thou! Thou wast exalted unto heaven; but how art thou brought down to hell!" What confusion is introduced among the works of God! "What desolations are made in the earth!" Here once stood a stately palace, built for the residence of God; which is now become the habitation of wild beasts, and of every unclean thing. Who can help shedding a tear over the mournful spectacle, while he reflects, that "Here God once dwelt!"

May the consideration abase our pride, when we perceive, into what a state of guilt and misery we are sunk; and may this endear to us the rich grace of our God, which has provided a remedy! We proceed, therefore, with the sacred history, and remark,

I. The fall of Adam. He did not long possess his original purity and glory; but, by one transgression, as he lost the image, he forfeited also the favour, of his Maker. Previously, indeed, to this sad catastrophe, it appears that sin had entered into the universe, and that a distinguished part of God's creation had already revolted. There had been war in heaven. A considerable number of those exalted spirits, who surround the throne of God, had conspired together against Him, under the guidance of one particular leader, called in scripture Beelzebub, Satan, or the Devil. What could the
event

event of such a contest be? Who shall "contend with the Almighty?" For "who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered?" The justice of God was signally displayed upon this vile apostate Angel, with all his rebellious company, who were, therefore, driven from their high station, and cast into outer darkness*. But not content with their own ruin, they endeavoured to bring this new-created world into the same destruction. To accomplish the design, Satan was permitted to lay his snares and practise his deceits, by means of a serpent, the success of which we too well know.

Our curiosity is not gratified with a minute description of the management of this artifice, many circumstances of which are concealed from us. But the principal fact is sufficiently established: and other scriptures confirm and explain the account which is given in Gen. iii. It appears, that the serpent, which first suggested the proposal of eating the fruit, was under the entire influence of Him, who was a deceiver, a liar, and a murderer, from the beginning†. The apostate spirit found access in this borrowed shape, and made his attack upon the woman, (as it should seem) apart from her husband. She was first deceived‡, and then prevailed upon Adam to join with her in the transgression. The temptation, probably, would have been rejected with abhorrence, had not Satan taken advantage of their separation from each other, and concealed his proper character. But he could only tempt, he could not

* Jude 6. † Rev. xii. 9.—2 Cor. xi. 3. ‡ 1 Tim. ii. 14.

force them to sin. No; the guilt was their own; and it were presumptuous to plead any thing in their excuse.

This base revolt commenced in giving ear to the proposal, which should have been firmly resisted on its very first mention. Let their posterity beware of the same subtle adversary, and be afraid to hold a parley with the Devil. He began in a very specious manner, "Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" as if desiring information, or insinuating, that perhaps they were mistaken in supposing, that God had given them so strict a prohibition, inasmuch as it appeared to be an unreasonable restraint. He advanced farther by degrees, till Eve's attention to him, and her wavering mind, emboldened him to say, "Ye shall not surely die." We may observe, how the temptation, weak and trifling in its beginning, gradually increased. O let us fly from the first enticements to sin, since we know not whither they may lead us. Let us take heed of listening to the suggestions of Unbelievers, who despise the denunciations of God's word, and flatter us with the hope of impunity. By this very device Satan gained his advantage in Paradise; and his constant language in every succeeding age has been, "Ye shall not surely die."

What, then, was the offence of our first parents? They did eat of the tree, whereof God had commanded them that they should not eat. "And where was the great harm of 'this?'" will some bold objector say. We are aware of the presumption of infidelity, which, by rejecting the authority of God, makes light of sin, and justifies the commission of the vilest abominations,
arrogantly

arrogantly maintaining, "I have done no wickedness." Let us consider, then, how heinous, and how highly aggravated this act of disobedience was, and learn the necessity of an unreserved subjection to God, whatever he may be pleased to enjoin.

The command was express, "Ye shall not eat of it:" nor was the duty difficult, since of every other tree in the garden they might freely eat. But, by the violation of so plain and easy a precept, they cast off their allegiance to God, and set themselves to oppose the divine government. This was such a contempt of their supreme Lawgiver, as tended to subvert his authority, not in this case alone, but in every other instance whatever. Indeed it is obvious, that their minds were under the influence of some of the basest principles and dispositions.

The temptation, we have seen, was first proposed to Eve, and by her representations Adam was seduced. This ought not to be alleged in justification of his conduct, for doubtless they were both actuated by the same corrupt affections. She would certainly urge upon her husband the motives, which had prevailed with her; and he, probably, consented to the sin on the very same grounds.

Behold, then, in what complicated guilt Adam was involved by this compliance; and see, how many offences were contained in one! He was led away by mere sensual desires, in contradiction to the voice of reason and of conscience, as well as of God himself: "The tree was good for food, and pleasant to the eyes." He discovered also the most horrid ingratitude,

and discontent. It was not enough for him, to be surrounded with blessings, poured upon him in rich abundance by divine beneficence, and to fill up a distinguished place in Creation. But, as if he were under no obligation to his gracious Benefactor, for all that had been done for him, or were dissatisfied with it, he could not bear that any thing should be withheld from him.—How hateful is a proud spirit! and yet this, in an especial manner, seems to mark the original transgression. As if it were painful to be laid under any restraint, he aspired at Independence; and not brooking the submission, which he owed as a creature, he affected an equality with God himself: “Ye shall be as Gods,” was the lure which was held out, and which he foolishly caught at. He was influenced likewise by a presumptuous, arrogant desire of obtaining that wisdom, which God had denied him. He listened to the artful insinuation, “that their eyes should be opened, and that they should know good and evil;” and therefore he coveted the fruit, which would make them wise. Do we not perceive also, that, in addition to all other evil principles, and as the source of them all, unbelief had full possession of him? He treated God as a liar, in despising his solemn denunciations, as not worthy of any credit. And to whom did he yield himself to obey, but to the father of lies, and the enemy of all righteousness? He joined with the prince of darkness, in conspiracy against the government of God. Will it not appear also, that “madness was in his heart,” if we take into the account the distress and ruin, that he hereby brought
upon

upon himself and his posterity? For this consideration much aggravates his offence. And shall it still be said, "Where was the harm of this?" Hence, then, we are led to examine,

II. The consequences of his fall.—Here indeed a gloomy prospect is presented to us. What can we expect, but confusion and misery, from a contempt and rejection of the authority of God! The original covenant, or the law of works, was now broken; all the blessings of it forfeited; and the penalty, denounced against the transgression, was incurred. Could Satan, then, make good his bold assertion, "Ye shall not surely die?" Alas! in this very circumstance he triumphed, that he had brought death and destruction upon the new creation, as if he had defeated the purposes of God.

What a change must Adam have experienced in himself! He suffered considerably in his body. It were vain to enquire, whether any, or what particular alteration took place in his outward appearance. Most undoubtedly his strength was impaired; the seeds of disorder were sown within him; and, probably, he very soon began to feel infirmity, pain, and sickness. Turned out of Eden, that delightful abode, he had now his habitation to seek in a wide world: and, while he saw the ground cursed with barrenness for his sake, he was doomed to eat his bread in sorrow and the sweat of his face, till he should return to the earth, from which he was taken.

If this were all, it had been tolerable. But a much more awful change took place in his soul! He

soon betrayed the emotions of irregular desires and vile affections, and found a strange war within, where all had been peace and joy. The terrors of conscience alarmed him; so that, condemned in himself, he was afraid to stand at the tribunal of his God.—And do we not perceive in him, not merely a dread, but a hatred of God? He fled from his presence, as if he wished not a reconciliation; and, as if deprived of understanding, attempted to hide himself from the all-seeing eye. But behold him arraigned as a criminal before his Judge! Does he humble himself, confessing his guilt, and imploring mercy? Alas! what pride and obduracy appear! No signs of penitence are discovered; not one prayer for pardon is offered up. He endeavours, by a mean subterfuge, to cast the blame upon the woman; and seems even to insult the great God himself.—“The woman, whom THOU gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat*.” And now what remains for him, but “a fearful looking-for of judgment, and of fiery indignation!” For not only was present happiness forfeited, but everlasting misery incurred. “The wages of sin is death;” not an utter extinction of being, but an eternal separation of the whole man from God. This is what the scriptures call “the second death†”. Adam, therefore, without a further revelation from God, must have sunk into the most horrible despair.

* Gen. iii, 12.

† See Mr. Jonathan Edwards’s Defence of the great christian doctrine of Original Sin, p. 189, concerning the kind of death threatened to our first parents.

But Redemption was already provided, and the gracious offer of it made to him, immediately after the fall. The Saviour of the world, whose counsels of mercy had been planned from eternity, was then promised, to encourage hope, where no hope seemed possible. The Lord himself passed sentence upon the Serpent, or rather upon Satan in the character of the Serpent, to confound his pride, and defeat his triumph: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*." But this declaration was principally designed for the support of our first parents, now trembling before their Judge, and awaiting the denunciations of his wrath. They could have no prospect of deliverance in themselves, nor had they any ground to expect it from their insulted Sovereign. In this tremendous situation, while they stand at his bar, he addresses them; and lo! in the midst of judgment he remembers mercy, and, to preserve them from utter despair, he gives them an intimation of ONE, who should arise to rescue them out of the hands of their enemy. We do not determine with what degree of clearness this gracious promise discovered, or was intended to discover to them, the great mystery of Redemption. But it is obvious, that hereby they would be led to look forwards to some future period, when one of their own posterity, "the Seed of the woman," should deprive the Tempter of that victory, which he had then obtained over them. They would understand,

* Gen. iii. 15.

that though there must be a severe and continual conflict maintained against Satan, and the Saviour himself should suffer in the contest, yet the issue would be very glorious, and, by means of this great Deliverer, the power of the Devil would be entirely destroyed. To suppose that the words had no farther reference, than to the Serpent, literally taken, is altogether ridiculous, unworthy the wisdom of the Judge, and the solemnity of his proceedings on that awful occasion, and inconsistent also with other parts of the sacred history. The promise, then, was clearly meant to give intimations of pardon and complete restoration to man, who must otherwise have despaired: and on this only foundation the religion of Adam was built, and, probably, that of all his posterity till the flood, and perhaps till the call of Abraham. For during all that period no other express promise of the Saviour, that we read of, was made to mankind; and without some promise from God, as a ground of trust and confidence towards him, it should seem that no religion at all can be supported among sinners, liable to condemnation*.

We rejoice, that this original prophecy has been fulfilled; that Jesus has appeared as "the Seed of the woman," that he entered the lists against Satan, and, though he suffered himself to be wounded in the combat, "overcame the wicked one." "Through death he has destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil †."

This salvation, we have seen, was revealed to Adam. Jesus was "the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the

* See Dr. Sherlock on Proph. Disc. iii.

† Heb. ii. 14.

world,"

world," not only in the counsels of God, but also in all the revelations and proposals of mercy made to fallen man.. Adam "saw his day," though it might be with much obscurity; and in token, probably, of his dependence on Him, who should "give life unto the world," he called his wife EVE, because from her the Redeemer would arise, and in Him she would be "the mother of all living." It seems also, that sacrifices were offered up, by divine appointment, both as a type of the Saviour, that was to come, and as a mark of reliance upon him. No other reason can be assigned for the death of those animals, with the skins of which our first parents were clothed*; for Abel's presenting unto God the firstlings of his flock†; and for the universal prevalency of sacrifices in religious worship, even amongst heathen nations.

But did the consequences of the fall terminate in Adam? Let us extend the prospect, and consider what effects it has had upon his posterity. Alas! we have heard from the beginning, we see on every side, and feel within us, the wretched fruits of the first transgression.

1. What extreme misery do we inherit? For what is the earth itself, but, as it were, a spacious hospital for the reception of unhappy sufferers of various kinds! We have proof of the fall in the calamities, to which even infants are exposed; we feel it in all our own pains and diseases; and we perceive it in the desolations, which death makes all around us.

* Gen. iii. 21.

† iv. 4.

2. To what a state of corruption and moral inability are we reduced! That we are now depraved, and full of vile affections, who will deny? See what are “the works of the flesh,” or the unvaried produce of our degenerate nature, as described by Him, who “knew what was in man,” Mark vii. 21*. And is not this the necessary consequence of the change which Adam experienced? For “who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean †?”

It will mortify our pride, to take an attentive view of the circumstances, in which we are now placed. Our understanding is darkened, our conscience defiled, our will perverse, our “heart deceitful and desperately wicked,” our thoughts “only evil continually.” We may observe our extreme depravity in the very gross abominations, which many run into with greediness, and from which others are restrained with difficulty; in that proneness to sin, which children in their earliest infancy discover; and in the secret corruptions, which good men continually feel and lament, in their best estate.

3. What have we, so circumstanced, to expect hereafter, but final ruin! We are therefore declared to be “by nature children of wrath ‡.” What else indeed can we conclude, but that a holy God must look down upon such polluted, rebellious creatures, with abhorrence! “To be carnally minded, is death||.” Will you deny that God means so much as this; or doubt whether he will fulfil his threatenings? Alas! do you

* See also Gal. v. 19.

† Job xiv. 4.

‡ Eph. ii. 3.

|| Rom. viii. 6.

not perceive the suggestions of an enemy, who is practising the same subtilties with you, as he did with Adam, and would deceive you to your everlasting destruction?

Various objections are raised against the doctrine of our original depravity; many of them vain, most of them highly presumptuous. The justice and the goodness of God are both arraigned; as if it were inconsistent with these attributes to create man under the very possibility of falling. We must confess, it is an awful subject: it has its difficulties; but they are such, as ought not to stagger us in the belief of the truth, and such too as are not peculiar to revelation*. Let us study the fall of man, then, not with that bold and cavilling spirit which these objectors seem to discover; but with deep humiliation, considering what we are,

* “ If there had never been an old testament, never a new one, mankind would have been at least as corrupt and miserable as they are at present. What harm, then, have the old and the new testament done to you, that you perpetually challenge them to account to you for the evil you suffer? You mislike, perhaps, the story of ADAM and EVE, and can by no means digest the account of the Serpent’s tempting and prevailing against our first parents. Very well: let this account, then, be laid aside, and what are you now the better? Is there not the same evil remaining in the world, whether you believe, or believe not, the story of the fall? And if so, what account do you pretend to give of it? For if you pretend to any religion, you are as liable to be called to this account, as any professor or teacher of the gospel.—Nobody is exempt, in this case, but the atheist; and his privilege comes from hence, that he has no account to give of any thing; for all difficulties are alike, upon his scheme.” Dr. SHERLOCK upon Prophecy, p. 233.

and

and what we deserve; and with earnest prayer, that we may know so much of it, as may concern our everlasting welfare. A time is coming when God will vindicate his own cause; when he will be pleased to remove the darkness which obscures our present views, and prove to us, that "all his ways are right." It becomes us to rest satisfied with this assurance, without daring to "reply against God."

One consideration ought to have great influence, and it is a sufficient answer to a thousand speculative objections; that the total corruption of our nature is a matter of fact, proved by the universal experience of all ages, and all countries, in all possible situations. It were absurd, therefore, to controvert such evidence as this. And shall we not acknowledge also, that we are all chargeable with many actual offences, a proper sense of which would cover us with confusion, and drive us to despair, were it not for the hope of the gospel?

Blessed be God, a complete deliverance is provided and accomplished for us. "As by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so, by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous*:" Salvation, neither obtained, nor even sought for, by ourselves, is proposed to us. Shall we object to this? or vainly dispute against it? Shall we not rather thankfully adore and bless the Saviour, who undertakes to be the "repairer of the breach," and says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved!"

But to return to Adam.—We left him a sinner, though created upright, and under the first experience of that awful change which his fall occasioned. Let us now attend to the sequel of his life. He was thenceforwards a man of sorrows; feeling in himself, and perceiving in his numerous posterity, the dreadful effects of his departure from God. A flaming sword, as the mark of divine indignation, was placed at the garden of Eden, to keep him at a distance, and prevent his approach to the tree of life*.

In process of time he became a father, and, no doubt, flattered himself with the prospect of much comfort from his two sons, Cain and Abel, who, as some think, were born to him at one birth.* But these very children soon proved the cause of extreme

* Gen. iii. 24. It is probable that the tree of life was emblematical; and that, if Adam had persevered in his obedience, this tree would have been as a Sacrament to him, to assure him of an everlasting state of felicity. But having lost all title to this by his transgression, he was therefore precluded the use of that Sacrament, when the blessings represented by it were forfeited. He must be driven out of Paradise, “lest he put forth his hand to the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever;” i. e. lest he should profane that divine ordinance, and presumptuously imagine, in opposition to God’s declaration, that he should still live, and not die.—But we rejoice, that JESUS has prepared, and opened for our reception, a better Paradise, and that He is the tree of life to us; so that, in the highest sense, we may eat and live for ever. “To him,” (says he, Rev. ii. 7) “that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.” Every faithful servant of Christ shall have that assurance, through his Saviour, of continuing in a state of bliss and glory, which the tree of life would have afforded Adam, if he had not sinned.

affliction to him. Contentions arose between them; and Abel fell a sacrifice to the envy and persecuting rage of Cain. Oh! what self reproach, what severe reflections must have rent the parent's heart, when he saw death, through his transgression, entering into the world; and by such a way, as made the trial tenfold more insupportable! The sin of the Murderer was, probably, far more distressing to him than the sufferings of the Martyr.

But another seed was granted him, and his hopes again revived in righteous Seth*, in whose family religion was professed, it should seem, with peculiar purity and zeal, and from whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came.

Suffice it to say, that Adam lived to see the earth overspread with wickedness, as well as filled with confusion and misery. But at length, according to the divine threatening, the dissolution of his body closed the scene, and he returned to the dust, from which he was taken. "He lived NINE HUNDRED AND THIRTY years; and he died †." How very different was the end, from the glorious beginning, of this character! Let us keep in mind the important instruction it conveys to us. We all bear the image of the first Adam, "who was earthy." We betray the strongest marks of a resemblance to him, in the infirmities of our bodies, and in the depraved affections of our souls. But, through the covenant of grace, "we shall also bear the image of the second Adam, who is the Lord from Heaven."

* Gen. iv. 25, 26. † v. 5.

What a subject for examination is here! Have we “put off the old man, which is corrupt?” And have we this evidence of being redeemed to God, that we have “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” and are renewed, after his likeness, in the spirit of our minds?

CAIN AND ABEL.

CHAP. II.

The two brothers widely different from each other—in their religious worship—their moral character—and their end.

WE are contemplating the world in its infancy: and a most lamentable prospect it affords us, even in the earliest period. Alas! what shall we find the history of man, from the beginning down to our own times, but the history of human wickedness? Yet, while we are presented with the sad picture of universal depravity, spreading through successive generations, many instances will occur to us, in which the grace of God has prevailed and triumphed over it.

We have seen, in the first of our race, the beauty and excellency of the creation polluted by sin. And now what can we expect from Adam's posterity? What, but that his corruption will be derived to them? "That which is born of the flesh, is flesh*:" the offspring of fallen man cannot but partake of a fallen nature. It was impossible, that Adam should communicate to his children the holiness, which he no longer possessed; that they should inherit from him the divine image, which he had lost. Yet, as a door of mercy was opened, and the purpose and method of

* John iii. 6.

Redemption was revealed, immediately after the fall, we shall have occasion to remark, that in every age God has had a peculiar people, separated to himself, redeemed from among men. Mankind, therefore, have been constantly divided into the two grand classes of Saints and Sinners. Even the family of Adam, before it had received any considerable increase, presents us with this distinction. How different the characters of Cain and Abel!

A short but clear description is given of their history, which will suggest many important admonitions to us. It should be our endeavour to learn righteousness, while we select some of the principal circumstances concerning them, recorded in the fourth chapter of Genesis.

Years before
Christ, 4003.

From the first born, Cain, Eve seems to have had pleasing expectations. "I have gotten a man," said she, "from the Lord;" rejoicing in his birth, as if he were granted to her in special mercy, and intended to be a peculiar blessing from heaven. Or, if with some we render the words, "I have gotten a man, the Lord," she apprehended the child to be none other than the promised Seed, the great Deliverer of the world. Alas! how extreme was her disappointment! Let us beware of expecting too much from children, remembering from what a corrupt stock they spring.

Cain "was of that wicked one*," the seed of the serpent. But his brother, how loyely a character! Our Lord himself, "who knew what was in man,"

* 1 John iii. 12.

styles him "righteous Abel*." In Cain we behold a dissembling, formal hypocrite, an unbeliever, a despiser of God, and a persecutor of his people; assuming for a season the form of godliness, but at last hurried away by the vilest passions, into the most horrid complication of iniquity. In Abel is exhibited a bright example of righteousness; a meek, but zealous servant of God, eminent in faith, steadfastly persevering in holiness, patiently suffering in the cause of religion, and finally closing his life with an honourable martyrdom.

Let us examine, Which of these do we resemble? Whose image do we bear? Are we followers of Abel; or, are we walking "in the way of Cain?"

We shall touch on the most important part of their history, in considering

I. The difference of their worship. Adam, it seems, like a pious parent, did not neglect the education of his children. They were both, therefore, trained up to diligence in worldly concerns, for "Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain was a tiller of the ground." They were also instructed to pay a strict attention to religious exercises, for they both professed to serve the Lord, and one as well as the other, externally at least, performed an act of solemn adoration. They appeared before God for the same purpose; but with dispositions most unlike. It is possible that the hypocrite, "whose sacrifice is an abomination to the Lord," may be as exact and punctual in all outward, ceremonial observances of devotion, as the most upright, "whose

* Matt. xxiii. 35,

prayer is his delight." We have need, therefore, to enquire, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?"

"Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, an offering unto the Lord: and Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof." Much stress is laid by some, upon the difference of value in the two offerings; as if Cain, in a contemptuous manner, presented to God what was of little worth, or what might first come to his hands; whilst Abel was careful to offer the best of his flocks. This, however, is not sufficiently obvious. Cain's offering might possibly be as troublesome and expensive as that of Abel; but, we are clearly told, it was not equally excellent, or acceptable to the Lord. And here the New Testament may be introduced as a comment on the old: an inspired Apostle assures us, that "BY FAITH Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it, he being dead yet speaketh*." It may be observed, then,

1. That Cain's seems to have been a mere thank-offering, paid in acknowledgment of favours received, not accompanied with contrition for sin, or intended to deprecate deserved punishment. Such a service as this might not have been unsuitable to Adam himself, in a state of innocence: for it implied not any confession of guilt, or any application to the Redeemer. This, therefore, was not the worship prescribed, or that which is peculiarly adapted to the state of a sinner: for, to such

* Heb. xi. 4.

an one, "without shedding of blood is no remission*." But it is observable,

2. That Abel's offering was a sacrifice, presented in faith, not only with a respect to the institution of God (who had ordained sacrifices as a representation of that method of Redemption, by which he would deliver man), but also with a dependence on "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," who was, in the fulness of time, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Abel's offering, therefore, is to be considered as a type of Christ; to whom he had regard, while he confessed his guilt, and implored forgiveness. This was the appointed way for a sinner's approach unto God; this the only acceptable worship from the beginning. For it is only by faith in the Redeemer's atonement, that the throne of grace is, or can be, accessible to fallen man.

See now their different success! Abel was received, and, probably, some outward token of divine favour vouchsafed to him. "The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering." In this it seems to be intimated, that he himself was first accepted, then his sacrifice. "He obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." And it is an important consideration, ever to be remembered, that in order to perform works well-pleasing to God, we must first be justified in his sight†. Cain, therefore, presumptuously despising or neglecting the appointed Mediator, was rejected with

* Heb. ix. 22.

† Works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God, &c. Article xiii.

abhorrence: “unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect.” How awful a state, to lie under visible marks of the divine displeasure! Yet, while the Lord thus distinguishes between persons, approving one, and condemning another, he acts according to righteousness and truth. This will appear, if we examine

II. The difference of their moral character. Religious principles cannot but influence the practice; and therefore we shall not wonder to find a striking diversity of manners in the two brothers. Abel, though not justified in the sight of God for his own works or deservings, but only for the merit of the great Redeemer, on whom he depended, yet, being renewed by grace, was a holy man, an exemplary saint, and persevered in a life of true godliness. Behold Cain, on the other hand, who was rejected of God not merely as a sinner (for as such, he might have obtained mercy), but as an unbeliever, putting away from himself the offer of a Saviour, under a proud conceit of his own sufficiency. By what vile affections he was actuated! What abominable tempers were discovered in him! When marked by the displeasure of heaven, instead of being humbled for his sin, he vindicated his own conduct, and rose with anger against God, as if he had deserved a better treatment. “He was very wroth, and his countenance fell.” A similar spirit is also perceivable in the hypocrites, whom Isaiah describes; “Wherefore have we fasted,” said they, “and thou seest not?” And are not modern Pharisees of like disposition, self-confident, presumptuous, forward to complain, and even to quarrel with God himself?

• Isaiah lviii. 3.

Cain regarded with envy the preference given to his brother, yet sought not to be a partaker of the same grace. Instead of admiring his holy life, he felt enmity and rage; and with great bitterness persecuted him for it. He could not bear the continual reproof, which he received from Abel's godly conversation: and this is said to be the ground of that hatred, the issue of which was so terrible, "because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous*," Here we observe the beginning, and the real cause, of persecution: and we do not wonder, as the same cause remains, that the same spirit appears at this time, which has been discovered in every other age, from the days of Cain. The most violent opposers of true religion, like him, are but fulfilling the original prophecy: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed, and her seed †."

Need any thing further be alleged, to prove, that Cain was the "enemy of all righteousness?"

Years before
Christ, 3875.

Behold him at last rising up with murderous rage against Abel, and shedding his blood! What an awful catastrophe was this; such as the sun had never before been witness to! How abominable an act, wantonly or maliciously to seek the destruction of a fellow-creature! But this was a murder particularly heinous; the murder of one, whose exemplary holiness of life, as well as nearness of relation, claimed every possible mark of kindness and affection: it was (in a word) the murder of a SAINT and of a BROTHER! To be capable of so aggravated a sin, betrayed the very temper of the Devil,

* 1 John iii. 12. † Gen. iii. 15.

Yet herein we perceive what human nature is, in its present corrupted state. The great enormities, into which some have run, shew what all men are liable to, and prove how very low we are fallen. Let each one be humbled before God under this conviction, and say, "Behold, I am vile!" It remains that we consider

III. The difference of their end. This must be taken into the account, in order to form a fair judgment "between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Abel "suffered for righteousness' sake," and, like his Saviour, "was delivered into wicked hands to be slain;" and herein he stands distinguished with peculiar honour. He leads the van in that "noble army of martyrs," who have sealed the truth with their blood, and are now before the throne, crying with a loud voice, and saying, "Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb*!" His disembodied spirit, though seemingly driven away with violence, wings its cheerful flight, is received up to glory, and appears in heaven, amidst the acclamations of thousand thousands, as the first fruits of the redemption of Christ. Who does not wish to follow him, though it should be through much tribulation, to inherit the kingdom? "He being dead yet speaketh" for the instruction and encouragement of all, to be "faithful unto death."

What an awful contrast does Cain exhibit! He was arraigned, like a guilty criminal, at the bar of God: and even there, with the utmost obduracy and pride, he refused to submit, or to acknowledge his guilt, foolishly attempted to conceal his sin, and dared to lye unto

* Rev. vii. 10.

God, and insult him to his face. "The Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not; am I my brother's keeper?" But vain were his subtrefuges: he was convicted, on the evidence of God himself, who said, "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground." Yet still he continued hardened, though the fact was proved against him: he deigned not to ask forgiveness, but even charged his Judge with cruelty or injustice; "My punishment is greater than I can bear."

What then was his sentence? That he should be driven out from society as an accursed thing, "a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth," which was doleful to a peculiar barrenness wherever he should dwell. A visible mark was fixed upon him, that every one might perceive in him the divine indignation against a murderer, and be deterred from offering violence to him. "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord," no longer making any pretences to religion, or joining in any of its ordinances, but avowedly casting off the fear of God, and hardening his heart, till he had filled up the measure of his iniquities.

Let us pause, and consider the destructive tendency of sin; that we may guard against its beginnings, whilst we perceive its progress to be so alarming, and its consequences so inconceivably terrible! Such is the government of God, such his righteous appointment, that misery seems the natural effect of guilt, and generally follows close upon it. But murder is an offence of the deepest die; as it not only strikes at the root of all human society, but is also a direct attack upon the
the

the Almighty Sovereign. For he, who aims to destroy "the image of God," would not hesitate to destroy the great Archetype himself*. Accordingly it is obvious that the Murderer is punished with peculiar vengeance, even in this life, and is marked out, beyond all other transgressors, as an object of divine indignation. However secretly he may have accomplished his purposes, he most commonly falls, at last, a sacrifice to justice. The God of heaven, as in the instance before us, takes the matter into his own hand, that He may prevent others from committing such a daring outrage against Him. But let us grant, that the man of violence may possibly escape detection, still he is, and must be, like Cain, "a terror to himself." He will suppose every one to be an enemy; and in the dread of meeting with a just retribution for his iniquities, he must be a stranger to peace. He will tremble at "the sound of a shaken leaf," and fly from his own shadow; and, wearied of existence, no wonder if he solicit permission to die, or become his own executioner. Herein we adore the righteousness of God, and learn the necessity of repressing sin in its first motions. "Let all bitterness and wrath be put away from us, with all malice."

And now, while we review the subject, let us turn our eyes to ourselves, and

1. Let us examine, what is the service we are offering to God? It is not enough, that we are attentive to religious ordinances; but are we, like Abel, worshipping by faith? How great a difference does God

* See Gen. ix. 6.

discern in those who tread his courts, when, perhaps, man can discover none ! May it not be said to many, who appear zealous for God, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me * ?" Ah ! what avail your very acts of devotion, except you have a continual regard in them to the grand propitiatory sacrifice of the Son of God !

2. Let us enquire, Are none actuated by the tempers of Cain ! Are there none, who, like him, are persecutors of God's people ? Oh ! how base your character ! You, who perceive no excellency in true holiness, but despise and hate it, you are, and must be, destitute of every amiable disposition, you are utter strangers to the divine principle of love, and are hurried away by the vile affections of envy, pride, anger, and revenge. Whose resemblance, then, do you bear ?

3. Let us bless God, that the blood of Jesus Christ "speaketh better things" than that of Abel †. The blood of Abel cried unto God for vengeance ; but that of Jesus Christ pleads for mercy. With such a plea, therefore, we may draw near to God ; and, while this is all our dependence, we shall not be disappointed of our hope. Let this encourage sinners to make immediate application for pardon in the appointed way. For "now in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off, may be made nigh by the blood of Christ ‡."

* Isa. i. 11.

† Heb. xii. 24.

‡ Eph. ii. 13.

E N • O C H.

C H A P. III.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, walked with God by faith, studying to please him—as in his presence—and in communion with him—assured of his acceptance, and translated to heaven.

Years before
Christ, from
3382 to 3017.

AFTER considering the history of the first-born of Adam, what can we expect from his succeeding posterity? We need not wonder, that very soon the earth groaned under the weight of their iniquity. Yet, in the sacred records, we shall find some of this corrupt race distinguished from others by a real excellency of character; but this difference we shall be taught to ascribe to the influence of divine grace.

Seth and Enos were probably endued with the true knowledge of God, and a fervent zeal to promote the cause of righteousness in their generation. It is observed, and seems to be mentioned to their honour, that in their time, “men began to call upon the name of the Lord*,” that is, an open profession of religion was then made, and the public worship of God instituted.

But out of a long catalogue of the antediluvian patriarchs, whose names are registered in Gen. v. one of peculiar eminence shines forth.* “Enoch, the

* Gen. iv. 26.

seventh from Adam," (says the sacred historian) "walked with God, and he was not, for God took him *." An inspired writer of the new testament has given the same honourable description of him; and has enlarged and illustrated the brief narration of Moses. "By faith Enoch was translated, that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation, he had this testimony, that he pleased God †."

The whole account of him is very short; but enough is told us, to prove, that he was a person of most exemplary piety, and that he stands recorded as a monument, to all ages, of God's favourable kindness towards those who serve him. While we contemplate this primitive saint, may we learn to follow him! May we perceive the excellency and happiness of those who are devoted to God, and be animated to greater earnestness and zeal in his service! We consider

1. His character. Though drawn in a concise manner, it suggests to us a variety of important instructions. "He walked with God;" that is, he was sincerely religious, and eminent for his attainments in holiness. How different is the description of the ungodly! They "walk not with God;" are "without God in the world," and "walk contrary to him." But true piety impresses the heart with an abiding sense of His greatness, goodness, and continual presence. It opens an intercourse between God and the soul, and produces a prevailing desire to please him. Enoch, being possessed

* Gen. v. 24. † Heb. xi. 5.

of right principles, was led, under their influence, to a holy conduct. * For it was "by faith," says the Apostle, that he attained to such a high distinction: it was owing, therefore, to his firm persuasion of the truth and excellence of what God had revealed. Being instructed, no doubt, by Adam (with whom he was contemporary for three hundred years) not only with respect to the existence and perfections of God, and his work of creation, but also in the consequences of the fall, and the way of reconciliation by the promised Redeemer, we conclude that he believed and embraced the promise, as the ground of his confidence towards God. We are not told, what degree of light he had in the doctrines of the gospel; but he was certainly acquainted with the grand design of redemption by Christ, and could not be ignorant of his first coming, whose second appearance he foretold*.

Let us seek to be "rooted and stablished in the faith," not only assenting to the general truths of religion, but especially "laying hold on the hope set before us," in our Lord Jesus Christ. Hence sprang Enoch's zeal for God, and his eminence in holiness. And we are not afraid to assert, that the advocates for Infidelity are the greatest enemies of mankind: for if scripture principles be banished, all barriers are thrown down, and a door is opened for every kind of licentiousness.

But let us take a more particular view of the good man, and examine how much is conveyed to us, when

* Jude 14. See Dr. Doddridge's Sermon on the Character and Translation of Enoch.

it is said that "he walked with God." From this one description it is obvious, that the following were among the leading features of his character.

1. Impressed with a sense of his obligations to God, he studied to please Him. This is clearly implied. Having the fear of God, he desired only to approve himself to Him, and took the divine command, and not his own will, for the rule and direction of his conduct. He lived in days of general corruption, when true religion was derided. But did he join with the multitude? Did he "walk in the way of sinners?" No; being separated from their society, he stood forth as a bold advocate for the cause of God; consulting, not what man practised, but what God required. According to St. Jude, he was active in reproofing sin, and, as "a preacher of righteousness," he faithfully warned the wicked of approaching Judgment, and denounced the terrors of the Lord against impious scoffers.

Is this a common character? Let every reader ask himself, Am I studying to please God? Ah! dare not to affirm it, if inclination alone directs, if sensual lusts and corrupt affections tyrannise over you: are you not, then, "walking after the flesh?"

Some are forward to plead in their own excuse: "We would act otherwise, but company seduces; we cannot help complying with the importunity of friends." What is this, but an acknowledgment, that you "walk according to the course of this world?" If all would be religious, you would be so too: but you dare not follow your own convictions in opposition to the maxims and customs of others. This is a mean
fervility

servility indeed: how different from the example of Enoch! For he could not but be singular in such a depraved generation: and all, who resemble him, must be so now. If, then, you would serve the Lord Christ, “fear ye not the reproach of men, nor be afraid of their revilings!”

2. He lived as in the divine presence. This is what nothing but an unfeigned and a lively faith could enable him to do. But like Moses, “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” Such a regard to God would have the happiest effect on our whole deportment. It was the advice of a Heathen, as the strongest inducement to a steady perseverance in virtue, always to imagine some good man present. But to be constantly mindful that God’s eye is upon us, must surely make a deeper impression on our hearts, produce, in our most secret retirement, a salutary fear of offending Him, and, in the most effectual manner, disperse all vile thoughts and imaginations. This consideration also would animate us to an unremitting zeal and activity in our public conduct, preserve us from making any base compliances with sinners, and render us useful in every relation of life.

Here we are defective; we forget God; therefore vanity possesses our minds, and temptations easily prevail over us. From the same cause it arises, that many put on a semblance of religion, acting only as in the sight of men. Remember, “God looketh at the heart;” and if you “walk with him,” you will not be satisfied with a form of godliness, or dare to practise hypocrisy.

3. He

3. He maintained communion with God. This, probably, is the main thing intended to be conveyed in the description of his character. He lived in a state of friendship with God. His "affections were set on things above," where his treasure was. God was his supreme delight: with Him he conversed, and to Him he had access with humble boldness and familiarity. Hence, no doubt, he enjoyed, while he was here on earth, sweet seasons of intercourse with God, as if he had been a citizen of heaven. Who does not envy the holy Patriarch? Who does not desire the same happiness? Many are discouraged from expecting it, and ask, "May we, without presumption, hope to attain to it?" Yes, surely: "the Lord's hand is not shortened;" and his grace, which enabled Enoch thus to walk, is sufficient for us. For the privilege of maintaining communion with God, is not confined to ancient times, but is promised to all penitent believers in every age*.

Do we, then, thus walk with God? Or, do we not, rather, discover a lifeless formality, even in our devotions? It need not be observed, that many know not what it is, to have "fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." A great part despise the very mention of it as Enthusiasm. And are there not, who are at no pains to obtain it; "who say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" Then what reception can such persons look for at his hands? We remark

* Isa. lvii. 15. 2 Cor. vi. 16.

II. The favour of God towards Enoch. It must be laid down as an important principle in religion, that **ALL IS OF GRACE**. But how astonishing does the condescension of our God appear? He bestows every gracious disposition: "from him all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed*;" and then he approves and rewards them in his people. Enoch owed it to his God, that he was so eminently distinguished from the men of his generation: and we should remember, it is by the rich mercy of the same God, that any of us are separated from sinners. But the Lord gave him special tokens of his love. He was not, therefore, left to doubt of his acceptance, as many sincere persons may be: for "he had this testimony, that he pleased God." And a knowledge of the divine favour is what We also may ask, and look for. Even now, "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Yet it ought not to be forgotten, that this happiness is promised only to the circumspect and active Believer†. How great, then, is their presumption, who deny the possibility of attaining an assurance of salvation! How sinful their remissness, who are satisfied without it! How awful their delusion, who expect or pretend to it, in any allowed habits of wickedness!

But a singular mark of the highest approbation was granted to Enoch: "he was not, for God took him; he was translated, that he should not see death." He was suddenly removed from the earth; without sickness,

* Liturgy. † Psa. l. 23. Isa. lxiv. 5.

pain, or any of the distresses attending a dissolution. It should seem that his body and soul together ascended up to heaven immediately, perhaps in a visible manner, accompanied with some bright appearance. Such was the assumption of the prophet Elijah, and of a similar sort will be that of the living saints at the general Resurrection. What a striking reproof must this event have been to the sinners of that day, who were scoffing at Enoch's piety! What an encouragement and comfort to the godly, who might have been ready to fear, "the Lord had forsaken the earth!" And what an high honour and favour to Enoch himself, to be taken away (without experiencing any bodily weakness or disease) from the midst of reproach and suffering, with such peculiar marks of the divine approbation, and received up to glory*!

This affords a most instructive lesson to all ages. We expect not the same interposition, as Enoch, to deliver us from the present evil world; but let us be faithful to God, and we shall, in an important sense, be soon translated too. Though we must undergo a painful dissolution, and the body must rest in the grave, until

* "BY FAITH Enoch was translated."—It is hereby generally understood, that by means of faith, as an inward principle, he attained a peculiar excellency of character, for which God was pleased to express his high regard, by taking him immediately to heaven.

But though this be true, perhaps a more consistent sense may be, that his faith, upon this occasion, had a reference to some particular promise of his translation, which, therefore, he looked and waited for, while, in the mean time, "he walked with God." Thus, we know, the translation of Elijah was intimated to him before the time, and the Prophet expected it. 2 Kings ii, 1, 11.

the consummation of all things, yet the spirit shall be instantly removed to unspeakable felicity. Let us give diligence to be followers of Enoch; and then we shall surely join "the general assembly of the first-born, which are written in heaven." How many are gone before us! And how immense will be the company, "when the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads*!"

Upon a review of the subject we are all concerned to enquire,

1. Am I "walking with God?" Difficulties will occur, even to those who are treading in this road, but "who is he that shall harm them?" The most powerful motives may be urged upon them, to encourage them to persevere. Let them remember, they are "strangers and pilgrims here," and, in dependence on the divine faithfulness, let them be continually looking forwards, with ardent expectation, to "the glory which shall be revealed in them." But alas! what worldliness and sensuality prevail among us! How few appear to be living for God! How few can say, they have known any thing of real communion with him! Happy are those, who, with unfeigned sincerity and unwearied diligence, are seeking for this privilege! While they admire the condescension of Jehovah, who will admit them to such a holy familiarity with himself, let them rely on his faithfulness, for He hath never said to any, "Seek ye me in vain."

* Isa. xxxv. 10.

2. What are my hopes? Can I approach to God, in full confidence of his favour? This is what you ought not to pretend to, if you are not habitually walking with him. It is not meant, that your comforts should be built on your own steadfast obedience (as if this were to be the ground of your dependence), but surely they are closely connected with your spirit and conduct. Wonder not, that distress arises from the neglect of any duty, or the indulgence of improper tempers. If you are worldly-minded, or indolent and cowardly in the cause of Christ, it is not at all surprising, that you should be oppressed with doubts and fears. If you profess to be God's servants, be faithful to him, and he will not be forgetful of you, but will make your consolations to abound through the knowledge of his Son. Let us ask again,

3. What are my views of death? It is an awful thing to die, and to enter upon an eternal state. Yet how transporting the change to Enoch! Nor is it uncommon to see a lively Christian rejoicing in his departure. The dissolution of the body, even with all its painful circumstances, will, in general, prove delightful to true believers, who have obtained the victory through Jesus Christ. But are you ungodly? You have, then, a most gloomy prospect before you. And how should it be otherwise? Shall God translate you, who are his enemies, into his blissful presence, as well as those, who are in strict friendship with him? No; he will make a difference; he will remove you, but not as he did Enoch. Ah! "what is the hope of the hypocrite,

pocrite, when God taketh away his soul*!" "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness, but the righteous hath hope in his death †."

What more suitable conclusion can we draw, than Enoch's prophecy, expressed in his own words? "Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all; and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds, which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him ‡."

Who does not pray, "May we find mercy of the Lord in that day, and be translated into the kingdom of his glory, through Jesus Christ!"

* Job. xxvii. 8. † Prov. xiv. 32.

‡ Jude 14. It is an enquiry more curious than useful, to ask, whence the Apostle received this account of Enoch's prophecy. It might be suggested to St. Jude by immediate revelation: or perhaps it was a well-authenticated tradition, preserved by the special providence of God, for our admonition, and St. Jude might be instructed to record it as a genuine history.

N O A H.

CHAPTER IV.

SECT. I.

Corrupt state of the world in the time of Noah, who was raised up for eminent services—his holy character—despised of men—beloved of God.

As many as can say with David, "All my delight is upon the saints that are in the earth, and upon such as excel in virtue," will find it a pleasing employment to contemplate Scripture Characters. Let us, then, examine, of what description were the people of God in ancient times, and what treatment they received in the world. We shall observe them, in almost every age, comparatively few in number, men despised and wondered at, passing through much tribulation; but, amidst all their trials, very dear to God, and the objects of his peculiar care. Would you be "followers of them, who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises?" While you walk as they walked, be not surprised, if you meet with the same unkind reception, the same contempt and opposition. Suffice it, if, like them, you be "kept by the power of God," favoured with the tokens of his love on earth, and at last admitted into his presence, to be partakers of his glory for ever.

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We are now come to a very important period in the sacred history. The life of Noah demands an attentive consideration, and is highly instructive. As an introduction to the subject; it may be proper briefly to describe

I. The state of mankind at that time. Though the world had been created little more than a thousand years, when Noah was born, it was probably filled with inhabitants *, as men in general, before the flood, lived to so great an age, that many generations flourished together. Adam himself, who was for a while cotemporary with Noah's father, had not long been removed. He must have seen, therefore, a very numerous, but (what was extremely distressing) a very depraved posterity. He must have seen his children's children corrupting one another, and making a rapid progress in iniquity. As their numbers increased, and "men began to multiply on the face of the earth †", they became more and more abandoned. It pleased God, however, to preserve a chosen seed in the family of Seth, from which it was designed that the Saviour should come. Scarcely any notice is taken of the rest of Adam's descendants, but the genealogy of this favoured line (to which, it seems, the church of God was confined) is carefully recorded; nor was it suffered to be destroyed, because "a blessing was in it."

* The greatest part of the antediluvian Patriarchs, whose ages are recorded, Gen. v. lived about 900 years. Lamech, whose age was 777 years, was the youngest, of any that we read of, who died a natural death.

† Gen. vi. 1, &c.

Did all these, then, walk uprightly before God? Ah! how difficult it is to live "unspotted from the world!" Even these were infected with the general contagion: and this very circumstance, that the professors of religion did not keep themselves separate from sinners, occasioned a more general corruption of manners, and hastened the destruction of the earth. Do we not herein observe the mischievous consequences of forming connections with ungodly persons and families? An intimate acquaintance of this kind is dangerous to the soul; and the more intimate it is, the greater must the danger be. Marriage, we know, is the most important union, in which, as a likeness of sentiments and dispositions is absolutely necessary to secure happiness, it becomes the man of God to be particularly circumspect in choosing his companion. But if carnal motives prevail with him, if caprice and passion, pride, or avarice direct his choice, if he have no regard therein to the concerns of another life, what prospect can he have of making any advancement, or even maintaining his steadfastness, in the ways of God? Is it probable, that he will "rule his own house well," or "bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?" To be therefore "unequally yoked together with unbelievers," is utterly inconsistent with that wisdom, spirituality, and zeal, which should characterize the servants of God; it may prove ruinous to themselves, and produce the most pernicious effects to their latest posterity.

"The sons of God," who should have stood forth with a holy singularity to uphold his cause, amidst the

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general

general depravity, were shamefully carried away by their own sensual affections; and thus they strengthened the hands of the ungodly, and left an unrighteous seed behind them. They "saw the daughters of men" (women, who sprung from irreligious parents, and had no sense of real godliness themselves), "that they were fair," and, without attending to any other consideration, "they took them wives of all which they chose." They followed the guidance of their own vain desires, and the consequence was, what might have been expected, true religion rapidly declined; for their offspring, who were the fruit of these marriages, inherited, not the piety which the fathers possessed, but the pride and folly of the mothers. The account of these unsuitable connections is clearly introduced as the principal reason, why matters were at length brought to a most desperate issue. Wickedness became triumphant, because the few, who retained the knowledge and the fear of God, discovered little or no zeal, were scarcely to be distinguished from others, or at least were strangely drawn aside by worldly compliances. They, who should have been "the salt of the earth," had lost their favour, and therefore were of no benefit to those around them. Let this stand as an admonition to all, especially to young persons, to beware of forming improper attachments.

But whilst sin is thus advancing with a daring effrontery, shall not God interpose to assert his authority, and vindicate his honour? Yes; he will make himself known by the signs and judgments which he will execute. He resolves therefore, "My Spirit shall

shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

The Spirit of God, then, it appears, strives with sinners, perhaps with those of the most profligate character; and to his influence, restraining by a thousand different ways the depravity of our nature, we owe it, that the world is not more abandoned than it is. But such is our perverseness, that we are ever resisting his admonitions and reproofs. Man, therefore, is represented as incurable: "he is flesh," entirely corrupt, and it were vain to expect from him any other than "the works of the flesh." With this base opposition of his rebellious creatures the patience of God was well-nigh wearied out in the days of Noah, when he determined to leave them to the just consequences of their iniquities, and, by one tremendous display of his power, to put an end to the contest. Yet behold his long suffering! Still he allows them a respite of an hundred and twenty years, during which period he waits upon them with offers of mercy. He warns, before he strikes; and while he defers his threatened vengeance, he proves that he will-eth not the death of them who perish, but that their destruction is of themselves.

Is it enquired, Was the case utterly hopeless? Yes; "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." How black the description of this poor apostate race! They were become more and more audacious in sin; nor could there be any prospect of amendment, as their heart was totally depraved; their thoughts, in every imagination,

imagination, evil; and this too, without any mixture of good, any interruption of time, "only evil continually." Do you ask, what evidence is given? "God saw it;" and he has vouchsafed to reveal to us the result of his observation. This is a testimony, better than that of a thousand witnesses.

Such, then, being the state of mankind, who can wonder to hear the fixed determination of a holy God, to destroy the earth with its inhabitants, and to leave a monument of his awful justice to every age? But was there no exception in this general deluge of iniquity? Yes; here is an individual selected for our notice. While God looks down with abhorrence upon a guilty world, it is recorded, that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." We are therefore led to consider

II. The character and conduct of Noah. The Lord would not suffer Satan to triumph (as if he had prevailed, to the total overthrow of the church) nor permit his own purposes to be defeated. He will, indeed, "make a way to his indignation," in the punishment of ungodly men; but a remnant must be saved, that, according to his own express engagement, "the Seed of the woman" may yet come to accomplish redemption. Behold, then, the loving-kindness of our God! In the midst of judgment he remembers mercy. Noah is the highly-favoured instrument of performing his truth towards us; for in him, and his posterity, the promise of the great Redeemer is secured.

Years before
Christ, 2948.

Noah was marked out, from his birth, as an extraordinary person, designed for eminent services. It was doubtless in the spirit of prophecy, that

that his father called him by a name, signifying *Rest*; not only as foreseeing, that he would be a comfort to his parents, and a public blessing in his day, but also, and perhaps chiefly, because in him the covenant of grace would be confirmed, and the Saviour, who alone bestows *Rest* upon the weary soul, and of whom Noah was an illustrious type, would proceed from him.

As he advanced in life, he was preserved from the general contagion, and “*escaped the pollutions of the world.*” The most honourable testimony is given of him. “*Noah was a just man,*” discharging the duty of every relation with fidelity, “*and perfect,*” that is, sincere and conscientious, “*in his generations,*” uncorrupted by the extreme depravity of the age. He stood firm against every temptation, and, notwithstanding all the scoffs and violence to which he was exposed, “*Noah walked with God;*” he was not only mindful of Him, in the habit of maintaining communion with Him, but also zealous for his cause. The piety of Noah was very eminent, and is mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel, in terms of the highest approbation*. He was a preacher, as well as an example, of righteousness; and whilst the long-suffering of God waited upon sinners, for an hundred and twenty years before the flood, Noah was commissioned for the special purpose of instructing and rebuking them, and warning them of their approaching destruction†.

We admire and commend his undaunted courage; but shall we not confess and be ashamed of our cowardice in the service of God? We perceive him re-

* Ezek. xiv. 14.

† 1 Pet. iii. 19. 2 Pet. ii. 5.

nouncing and reproof "the works of darkness," though licensed, as it were, by general custom: but are not we afraid to avow our abhorrence of the evils, we see commonly practised; and, through a base timidity of spirit, do we not make many compliances, which we condemn in our hearts? Will the fashion of the times justify us? No: we ought to exert ourselves the more in opposition to sin, because it is countenanced by multitudes: and though we should stand alone, as Noah did, we must refuse to be "conformed to this world;" we must "come out, and be separate." Ah! where is the zeal of our fathers? May God "revive his work," and raise up persons of faithfulness and activity, such as Noah was, to promote his glory! For surely we have cause to lament, that "iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold," We proceed to consider,

III. The reception Noah met with,

1. From men. Some have supposed, that a virtuous character will always be honoured with general approbation and esteem. But this is contrary to fact, and the experience of all ages. Was Noah held in reputation? Or were his admonitions regarded? It is probable, that universal contempt was poured upon him, and that both his preaching and his building of the ark were subjects of profane ridicule. The sinners, whom he reproofed, would not be convinced they were in any danger; and, therefore, "casting his words behind them," they continued their vile practices, "till the flood came, and destroyed them all *."

* Luke xvii. 27.

Such is the unfavourable treatment, which the faithful witnesses for God, in our own day, invariably receive. Their holiness is reproached and hated, as an unnecessary preciseness; and their solemn warnings are laughed at as idle bugbears, which serve only to terrify weak minds. Should they, therefore, give way to dejection, and desist from their work? No; without attending to present inconveniences, they should steadfastly persevere in righteousness, and with great courage both act and speak for God, believing, and rejoicing in it, that their reward is with Him; that “though Israel be not gathered, yet shall they be glorious.”

We enquire, then, what was this good man's reception

2. From God. It becomes us surely to be most solicitous to obtain “the honour, which cometh from God.” And in what light was Noah considered in the court of heaven? “He found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” It was distinguishing grace, which enabled him to maintain his integrity; and peculiar marks of the divine favour were put upon him. Amidst all the contempt and opposition of the world, the Lord was his comfort and defence, gave him the tokens of his love, communicated his purposes to him, as if Noah had been one of his council, and entered into an express covenant with him: “With thee will I establish my covenant.”

The proper conclusion for us is, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” And when, in the language of faith, we can say, “The Lord is my helper,” we need

need not fear "what flesh can do unto us." Let it, then, be our chief desire to approve ourselves to Him, esteeming "his loving-kindness to be better than life itself."

This part of our subject will teach us,

1. The depravity of man. When he is suffered to walk in the way of his own heart, the consequence will ever be, as before the flood; he will "commit all iniquity with greediness." The case has been the same in every age. The history of the world, then, holds out a striking proof, that "we are very far gone from original righteousness, and are of our own nature inclined to evil*."

2. The patience of God. "Judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily." The Lord beareth long with his enemies, "waiting to be gracious." O despise not, as the sinners of old did, "the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long suffering," but let "his goodness lead thee to repentance!"

3. The care of God towards them who fear him. He may, perhaps, appoint their habitation among the ungodly, and permit them to be "evil-entreated;" yet his eye is upon them for good, and he will in due time bring deliverance. O ye that love the Lord, rejoice and be exceeding glad! "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" but you know Him that hath said, "In me ye shall have peace;" and it is your privilege to be "persuaded, that nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

* The ninth article.

N O A H.

SECT. II.

Noah, acquainted with the purpose of the deluge, built the ark in faith—preserved in it—brought out—offered sacrifices, and received promises—saw the world again corrupt—fell into the sin of drunkenness, but recovered—foretold the state of his posterity.

As we advance from one character to another, we shall not only have frequent occasion to remark “what is in man,” but also perceive the most evident signs of a wonderful plan of divine government, uniformly carried on amidst all the commotions and the changes, which have happened in the world. The various dispensations both of judgment and mercy, from the beginning, all point to one grand object; the coming of the great Redeemer, and the establishment of his kingdom. This was the purpose of God, which the foolish and wicked devices of his creatures could neither defeat nor retard; and all events have been so ordered and overruled, as to promote the gracious design. What a glorious and extensive view does this consideration open to us! We are constrained to cry out, “O Lord, our Governor, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

Perhaps there is no period of history more remarkable, or more instructive, than that which is now before

us,

us, the life of Noah. We must feel ourselves deeply affected by the bare narration of those astonishing calamities, to which he was witness; and we cannot but learn many useful lessons from the man, who was distinguished above all the rest of his species, and selected to be a singular monument of the divine favour to our fallen race. May we be partakers of his faith, and, like him, be kept by the power of God, in days of peculiar depravity, or of the most desolating judgments, if such should be appointed for us!

We proceed to consider the situation of this eminent saint,

I. At the time of the deluge. It has been observed, that great grace was upon him; while the world around him had universally and avowedly cast off the fear of God, and were "committing all iniquity with greediness." This difference of spirit and conduct could not pass unnoticed by Him, who most exactly "discerns between the righteous and the wicked." We have, therefore, seen, that the Lord looked upon Noah with complacency and delight; whilst his fierce anger was kindled against the very numerous class of ungodly men. He condescended to commune with him, as one friend with another, and revealed to him the tremendous purpose of destroying all flesh by a flood of waters. "God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me *." But designs of mercy were made known to this holy man; and the Lord entered into the most express engagement, to save him and his little family from the

* Gen. vi. 13, &c.

general ruin. How gracious was the intimation, "With thee will I establish my covenant!"

The method of deliverance, with all its minutest circumstances, was of the divine appointment. The Lord himself directed Noah to prepare a vessel of immense size, a capacious ark, which might contain his household, and a small remnant of all other creatures, for the preservation of their different species. In this building the various orders of animals, with sufficient provisions for their support, were to be accommodated, and to ride in security, while the deluge prevailed, and one common desolation swept away the inhabitants of the earth with all its furniture. The work was a vast and formidable undertaking; and it should seem, that nothing could have encouraged Noah either to begin it, or persevere in it, but a firm reliance upon God, and unreserved devotedness to Him.

Behold, then, both the faith and the obedience of Noah, by which he has exhibited a bright example of righteousness to all succeeding ages! An inspired writer has taught us, that faith was the principle, from which all his obedience sprang. "He believed God;" and therefore, whatsoever God commanded him, he cheerfully performed. For "by faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith*." In full persuasion,

* Heb. xi. 7.

then,

then, that God would fulfil his word, he complained not of the arduous task assigned him; but set about the strange employment of building the ark; and at the same time stood forth as a bold reprover of that wicked generation, calling them to repentance, and denouncing against them the threatenings of an incensed God. This must have been a severe trial indeed, a painful office to Noah. How many obstacles had he to surmount upon the occasion! What wonder, if his heart had misgiven him, and he had deserted his post, when he considered how much he had to contend with; when he perceived the spirit and the practice of the world, so opposite to himself, and observed that he was treated with universal disregard and contempt. Or, had he lost sight of the promise and the command of God, and attended only to his own reasonings, he would probably have come to this conclusion, that such an event as the deluge, for the destruction of all living creatures, never could take place; or, if it should happen, that any vessel, he might be able to construct, would be utterly insufficient to weather out the storm; that there could be no escape, and that all must unavoidably perish together. Reason may hesitate, cavil, and reply; but faith acquiesces in the divine declaration, and silences all objections with—THE LORD HATH SAID IT. Let us seek to be possessed of this efficacious principle, and to live under its influence, and then we shall be active and zealous for God, whatever dangers may threaten us, whatever difficulties may obstruct our path.

Is it in vain to trust, or serve the Lord? Let us behold, and admire his grace and faithfulness, in the instance before us. Did he leave this righteous man to the insults of his enemies? Did he not fulfil his word, both of judgment and mercy? He watched over Noah, as it were with parental tenderness and care: and, when the appointed time drew near, his heavenly Monitor again instructed him, and warned him, seven days before the desolation began, that all necessary preparations might be made. "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth*." With the utmost kindness and condescension, he then invited him into the habitation provided for him: "Come thou, and all thy house into the ark." But how shall the various tribes of animals be collected; or become willing to take up their abode together, in one confined receptacle? How shall "the wolf dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid†?" Behold, the whole creation was again subjected to man; all creatures were taught to obey him as their lord; and, in a way which cannot be explained on any other supposition, than that of an Almighty power immediately exerted upon them, as many as were designed to be preserved, offered themselves, "went in two and two unto Noah into the ark," and there yielded a ready submission to him. But what security could be given, that neither the violence of the wicked, seeking a refuge for themselves, nor the rage of the waters, prevailing every where, should break in upon him in

* Gen. vii. 4, &c. † Isa. xi. 6.

his retreat? The same hand; which directed him to this place of safety, effectually guarded him against all assaults: the door was made sure: "the Lord shut him in."

This was a surprising deliverance indeed; and each circumstance in it may justly excite our most devout admiration. But have we not encouragement, in every age, to expect the gracious interposition of God, in favour of those who fear him? Or, "did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded?" The very instance, we are now considering, is quoted by an Apostle as a general example, by which all the inhabitants of the earth, to the end of time, may be instructed, that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations." But it contains also a solemn admonition, that he will "reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished*."

While therefore we accompany Noah into the ark, we turn our eyes to the world, of which, no doubt, he took his leave with many painful sensations: and what a wonderful and tremendous scene is here presented to us! Can imagination, with its utmost stretch, picture to us the awful desolation, when "the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened?" Oh the lamentations and the bitter cries of thousands, perishing by that very calamity, the kind notices of which they had refused to attend to, or had presumptuously derided! Many of Noah's dear relations were included in this number.

What distress and anguish must he have felt for them! But in vain: they had despised his warning: their day of grace was past: and he could afford them no relief. There was no hiding place, no refuge from the storm, but the ark; and "the door was shut." The flood, therefore, which soon rose above the highest hills, bore all away with an irresistible force, and buried ungodly sinners in one common destruction.

On such a subject, what reflections become us? Shall we indulge a speculative curiosity, or enter into any nice enquiries concerning it? Alas! to what purpose? Curiosity never promoted the interest of true religion. Though many questions, therefore, might arise, it were better to check them. Perhaps we do not clearly comprehend by what particular means the deluge could be produced. But the power of God is surely sufficient to account for it: and the fact itself is evident: for, besides the scripture record, we have the testimony of tradition; a general notion of some such event as this, having prevailed from the earliest times. Many circumstances also in natural history tend to confirm it; as it has been well argued, that the trees, which are found in the bowels of the earth, and the shells, and bones of fishes, which are dug out of the tops of mountains, afford a strong presumption, that an universal convulsion has taken place.

And do not "our hearts meditate terror," while we are contemplating the effects of the divine vengeance? "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?" What a striking proof is here exhibited, of his justice in punishing

nishing iniquity, and of his veracity in executing his threatenings! Shall any among ourselves dare to trifle with Him? Shall any disbelieve his word? Let sinners dread his wrath, and seek to escape from it!

When the decrees of an angry God were fully executed, what became of "the remnant according to the election of grace?" A pleasing prospect again opened upon them, when the waters were abated, and the dry land appeared. But Noah, with all that remained of the creation around him, continued shut up in the ark; and, for some time, their Deliverer came not to their relief. This, probably, was a season of very painful suspense; and it should seem, that Noah was weary of his restraint, and in some measure impatient and unbelieving. Many fears might be suggested to his mind: the thought might arise, "The Lord has forsaken, or forgotten me." But at length his liberty was restored. "God remembered Noah*," and brought him out in safety, after little more than a year's confinement. Hence we proceed with his wonderful history

II. After the deluge. Called out by divine command (for God had said, "Go forth of the ark,") he and his numerous retinue quitted their Asylum, and entered upon a desert world. A scene entirely new was then presented to him; but every thing, we should suppose, would tend to fill his soul with gloomy apprehensions. Wherever he turned his eyes, he saw the devastations which sin had made,* and perceived the

* Gen. viii. 1, &c.

vast exertions of labour necessary for his own support. Could he forbear reflecting, with unutterable anguish, on the multitudes who had perished in their iniquities? Could he attend to his own situation, or look forward to the future, without feeling immense difficulty and distress? But what were his first emotions, upon his deliverance? A sense of gratitude overpowered him, and swallowed up every other concern. He began the renewed duties of life with an act of solemn worship to his merciful Preserver, devoting himself afresh to his service. "Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar."

Is it enquired, why the blood of an animal was shed, and offered up as a religious rite? Sacrifices, no doubt, were of God's own appointment, instituted on purpose to typify the only way of forgiveness, by the Death of the Redeemer; and they derived all their efficacy from the reference they had to the grand propitiation for the sins of mankind. By virtue of this atonement, then, and not by "the blood of bulls or goats," Noah approached his God with acceptance, and obtained an answer of peace: "The Lord smelled a sweet savour." We also are encouraged to draw near to that God, who pardoneth iniquity, and declares himself "well pleased in his beloved Son:" nor do we doubt of a gracious reception through Jesus Christ, while we remember, that "he hath given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour*."

* Eph. v. 2.

Noah, we have seen, devoted himself to God, and, in return, received the most express assurances of the divine regard. The covenant of grace had been revealed from the beginning; and upon this occasion it was renewed with great solemnity, that it might be known, in the new world, that "God had not in anger shut up his tender mercies." "Behold, said he, I establish my covenant with you." A fresh grant was made to man of an universal dominion over all living creatures, and, it seems, with an additional liberty of eating animal food; and a promise was added, that, by the over-ruling influence of providence, the seasons should be regularly continued in their order, and that no other deluge should ever be brought upon the earth for its destruction. The bow in the cloud was appointed as a token of God's faithfulness and love; nor is it, at this day, without a meaning to us. We look upon it with peculiar confidence and joy, because it represents to us our security, not from a flood of waters only, but from all the effects of the wrath of God. For thus saith the Lord himself; "This is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee*." To this unchangeable

* Isa. liv. 9, 10.

covenant, whereby the God of heaven binds himself to bestow upon us all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus; we fly for refuge. We rejoice that it is "ordered in all things and sure," and we thank God that it is such a foundation for our hopes, as cannot be subverted.

It were needless to follow the Patriarch through all the difficulties of his new situation; and to view him, either instructing his offspring, or building and planting, to provide for himself and his family. Suffice it to say, that he lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood, and saw a numerous posterity. The world was peopled afresh. And did a better seed arise? Alas! what is man? It soon appeared, that he is incurable by any outward means, and utterly hopeless in himself. What must have been Noah's feelings, when he perceived sin revive, and again prevail around him? He was continued, till mankind were almost universally sunk into idolatry, and the knowledge as well as the fear of God seemed to be entirely banished. How strange it was, that this should happen in his time, and in his presence! But what can correct, or even restrain, the extreme corruptions of our nature?

We could wish to close the account here, but we are compelled to take notice, that, in one instance at least, Noah proved awfully inconsistent with himself, and fell from his steadfastness, in a most grievous manner. The holy scriptures strike at the root of human pride, and lay our glory in the dust. With great plainness and simplicity, therefore, they relate the failings of the most excellent saints; and this they do, without making any comment, and leave us to draw the necessary conclusion.

Noah

Noah was "perfect," that is, upright, but not sinless: his character, therefore, does not appear without a blemish. He was betrayed into the horrid sin of drunkenness. "And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and was drunken*." Some have supposed, that he was not guilty of any criminal excess, as not being previously aware of the effects of wine. But it is highly improbable, that he should be thus ignorant, who had lived five hundred years in an age remarked for its dissipation and intemperance. Yet we cannot help wondering, that, having stood against former temptations, he should at last be overcome, at a time too, when he had none to seduce him. We must not justify his offence, nor need we attempt to conceal it. We may learn much from it for our own admonition and improvement. Let us hence remark

1. The continual proneness of man to depart from God. What an apostate creature does he appear to be! How entirely corrupt, how "very far gone from original righteousness!" This is evident from the state of the world before the flood, and from its rapid progress in iniquity after it. And does not the fall of Noah teach us the same truth? Let us examine, what is in our hearts; and instead of bitterly inveighing against him, let us lie down abashed before God, under a conviction of our own depravity. We may remark also,

2. The great evil of sin. It is lamentable to observe around us a prevailing tendency to licentiousness.

* Gen. ix. 20, 21.

For are there not many, who are daring enough to plead for every violation of the divine law? These persons are ever forward to quote scripture examples for their own profane purposes; and think themselves justified in their wicked practices, because Noah and other eminent saints have fallen. But they should be told, that no servant of God can live in the allowed and habitual transgression of any duty. Noah continued not in his intemperance; nor was he forsaken of his God, who returned to pardon and to heal his backsliding. The Spirit of God again rested upon him, under the prophetic influence of which, not with sentiments of anger and revenge, he predicted the future condition of his children and their posterity, denouncing the judgment of God upon one branch of his family, and proclaiming the counsels of the divine favour towards the others*.

But it is granted, and ought to be noticed, that his conduct was highly blamable, and his guilt particularly heinous, his character and situation considered. He had appeared as one eminently holy, a reprover of others, "a preacher of righteousness," and he was then the head of the creation. His offence was also aggravated by the awful proofs of God's indignation against sin, which himself had witnessed in the destruction of the old world. The distinguished mercies he had received, render his ingratitude the more base and detestable: His household alone had been rescued from the general ruin, and he himself had been admitted to en-

* Gen. x. 25—27.

joy an immediate communication with the God of heaven.

There will be nothing in Noah's example, properly considered, to make us think lightly of the smallest transgression. It will certainly be found, that "it is an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord," and that in every case "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." And hence we remark

3. The necessity of continual watchfulness and prayer. Some sincere persons may wish to fly from the hurry of business, and even to seclude themselves from society, in order to be preserved from temptation. But do we not observe, from the instance before us, that no place is secure; and that the most retired abode, as Noah's was, is no defence to the soul? The reason is evident: we carry about with us our most dangerous enemy; and "he that trusteth in his own heart, is a fool*." Then only we are safe, when we are watching and praying; for then we have the promise of a never-failing protection from above.

* Prov. xxviii. 26.

A B R A M.

C H A P. V.

S E C T. I.

Abram, the friend of God—a descendant of Shem—called from his native country—for what reasons—went in faith—sojourned in Canaan—retired to Egypt—upon his return to Canaan, parted from Lot—received fresh promises—rescued Lot—met by Melchisedec.

A CHARACTER of peculiar eminence is now before us. Much may be said in commendation of Abraham, whether we consider his faith, or his obedience (each of which is highly celebrated by the sacred writers), or whether we attend to the distinguished rank allotted him, not only as he was the Founder of the Jewish nation, but also (in a sense) the Head of the universal Church, “the Father of the faithful.” We are not afraid of setting a greater value than we ought upon One, whom the Lord himself honoured in a very singular degree, and on whom he bestowed marks of uncommon regard. We need not seek for a more exalted title for the holy Patriarch, than what St. James has given him, “Abraham was called the friend of God*.”

* James ii. 23.

Can any distinction be conceived more glorious than this? How eager are men in general to form connections with those, who are placed in any elevated situation! How ambitious to be admitted, on terms of intimacy, into the society of those, who possess a large share of the power, the wealth, or the pageantry of the world! They consider themselves as deriving a dignity from their superiors in life, who will deign to favour them with a familiar intercourse. Alas! how vain is the boast, since we are all upon a level in our original, and are all (without excepting the mighty, the rich, or the learned) polluted, guilty, and condemned. Very poor indeed, then, is the honour that cometh from men; but of unspeakable value is that which cometh from God only. To be received into a state of union and fellowship with Him, to be an object of his love, is a never-failing source of the strongest consolation, and the noblest dignity to which man can be raised. "Abraham was called the friend of God." We admire the condescension and the grace of "the High and Lofty One, that inhabiteth Eternity, whose name is Holy," that He can behold, with such kindness, a worm and a sinner of the earth!

But is not this a privilege, to which we are forbidden to aspire? No: there is a way, in which even we may be "blessed with faithful Abraham:" for we are all, not the friends only, "but the children of God, by faith in Jesus Christ." It will appear, indeed, that Abraham was held in peculiar estimation; but in his best estate he had not, any more than another man,

“whereof he might glory before God*.” All his excellency was derived from the free grace of God alone; and we also are encouraged to pray, that an abundant portion of the same grace may rest upon us, to bring us near to God, and to enable us to maintain continual communion with him.

Years before
Christ 1956.

Abram (for so he was called originally) was born only two years after the death of Noah, though there were nine generations between them. He descended from that Patriarch in the line of Shem, upon whose family the promised blessing of the Saviour was entailed by his father's prophecy†. But though the genealogy be preserved, scarcely any thing else is told us, except the names, of all the men, who lived from the flood till the time of Abram. The sacred history seems to hasten to this character, as to one of singular importance, and dwells upon some of the minutest circumstances of it.

Yet even of Abram we read but little, till he had arrived at, what we should account, a late period in life. He received his education, and spent a considerable part of his maturer age, amongst an idolatrous people. His very parents were strangers to the true God, and probably Abram also was an idolater‡, till in mercy to him, to his numerous posterity, and to the universal Church after him, it pleased God to interpose, by making an express revelation of Himself, and to separate him from all the other kindreds of the earth.

* Rom. iv. 2. † Gen. ix. 26. ‡ Josh. xxiv. 2.

Years before
Christ 1921.

When Abram was seventy-five years old, the Lord called him (in a way, certainly, which excluded all doubt from Abram's mind, and with an influence which disposed him to obey the call) to leave his father's house and his native country. As very much is said in Scripture concerning this remarkable dispensation, it will require some further attention from us. The fact is soon related, but various important instructions are to be derived from it.

The command was given him, that he should immediately forsake the place of his abode, and all his connections in it, and commence a sojourner in a strange land, till under the divine direction he should come to a kingdom appointed for him. Promises were added for his encouragement; respecting his posterity, that from him should arise a numerous and powerful people; and respecting himself, that God would put such an honour upon him, as not only to make his name great, but also to render his life a general blessing to mankind. It does not appear, that Abram then understood the extent of that prediction, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed;" but to us there can be no doubt, that it was designed as an intimation of the Saviour, who was to descend from him, and by whom alone the curse of sin can be taken away, and the sinner become truly blessed.

The divine will was no sooner known than obeyed. Abram departed from Ur of the Chaldees, with his aged parent Terah, his wife Sarai, and Lot his brother's son, together with all their substance. Their first re-

move was to Haran in the same country, where probably they continued, on account of Terah's infirmities, till he died. It should seem that a second call was given after Terah's death, when Abram again set forward on his journey with all his household; and with the Lord God for his guide and defence, he was safely conducted into the land of Canaan*.

Perhaps it is enquired, Where could be the necessity, or what the design, of this singular providence? In answer to which, it may be proper to advert to the state of the world at that period. The knowledge of God had almost perished from the earth. There was scarcely a family to be found, in which Idolatry did not prevail. But how strange and unaccountable is this, on any other supposition than that of the total corruption of man, and his utter alienation from God †! To what shall we ascribe it, that the greatest part of our species have at all times run into the grossest absurdities, in their notions of the Deity, and even in their religious rites? We must be constrained to allow surely, that human Reason, degenerate as we now are, is a very insufficient guide in spiritual concerns. How little can

* Gen. xi. 31. xii. 1, 5. Acts vii. 2.

† "This strong and universally prevalent disposition of mankind to idolatry, of which there has been such great trial, and so notorious and vast proof, in fact, is a most glaring evidence of the exceeding depravity of the human nature; as it is a propensity, in the utmost degree, contrary to the highest end, the main business, and chief happiness of mankind, consisting in the knowledge, service, and enjoyment of the living God."

Edwards on Original Sin, p. 65.

we discover by it, without Revelation! Nor was there ever a Revelation given, which Reason has not been employed to set aside or pervert. We appeal to fact and experience: and in this view the study of history will be extremely useful; though it cannot but mortify our pride, while it faithfully represents to us the wretchedness of our natural condition. Man appears involved in gross darkness indeed; ignorant of the divine perfections, and unwilling to retain the knowledge of God when revealed to him*. We have seen what was really the case for the first two thousand years from the Creation; that is, till the call of Abram. No warnings or instructions, not even the most tremendous judgments, could prevent the depravity of human nature from breaking out into daring outrages: and whatever notices God vouchsafed to give concerning himself, they were all, very shortly, corrupted and despised.

Had God, then, determined to leave this poor perverse race to themselves, the consequence, it is obvious, must have been truly deplorable. But he will shew mercy "for his own name's sake;" and, at the period we are now considering, he interposed in a method very different from what he had ever used before. Till that time, the Church had been, in a great measure, mixed with the world, without any visible mark of distinction, and had thereby contracted much pollution. But then it pleased God to institute a separate society, defended as it were by "a wall of partition;"

* Rom. i. 28.

and for this purpose he selected one family from the rest of the earth, in which he designed to preserve the true knowledge and worship of himself. Such was the intent of the call of Abram; which was, doubtless, a peculiar honour put upon him, yet not to be considered as a private benefit. He was fixed upon as the favoured instrument of God, to bestow the most important advantages on mankind; in part by the preservation of pure religion, but chiefly by preparing the way for His coming, "in whom all the families of the earth are blessed*." Thus was Abram appointed to be the founder of the Jewish Church, and a very eminent Progenitor of the Messiah. Nor are we, at this distance of time, unconnected with him; for as St. Paul argues, "He is the father of all them that believe;" and all the household of faith are called "the children of Abraham†."

But do we not perceive, in this instance, a pattern for ourselves? Yes: we must be willing to go, wherever God shall point out the path; nor must we decline any duties, however arduous, which He shall enjoin. We observe Abram cheerfully following the divine direction, when he forsook his native country. This he must have done against many struggles of natural inclination, and probably in opposition to the entreaties of

* "We are to consider it," says Dr. Sherlock, speaking of the call of Abraham, "not as a partial favour to that family alone, but as the opening of that scene, which was to bring a blessing upon all nations of the earth." Disc. on Proph. v.

† Rom. iv. 11. Gal. iii. 7.

his friends. Neither did temporal advantages induce him to continue in Chaldea, nor the extreme inconveniences and distresses of a long and uncertain pilgrimage deter him from it. But let it not be forgotten, that, in order to obey like Abram, we must be possessed of the very principle, by which he was actuated: we must believe God, that it shall be, even as he hath said. For "BY FAITH Abram, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went *."

For his steadfast faith, above every other grace, Abram is distinguished, and proposed as an example to us. And they only, "which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abram †." But while we allow the necessity and the excellence of this principle, let us understand its nature, and see what effects it will produce. It is a full persuasion in the mind, that God will fulfil his word, to which it gives entire credit, and on which it depends with confidence, in expectation of events which would otherwise appear unlikely, and even impossible. It has generally to combat with various and great difficulties: Yet, as it rests not upon human probabilities, or rational deductions, but simply on the faithfulness of God, where his will has been expressly declared and clearly understood, no objections whatever can have any weight with it. The believer, therefore, ought not to waver, though his way may be dark, and many obstructions lie before him; in reli-

* Heb. xi. 8. † Gal. iii. 9.

ance on the promise, he ought with full assurance to expect the blessing, though he knows not how it can be accomplished: He must "hope against hope." Where there are no trials, faith has no peculiar exercise. Is this sufficiently attended to by those, who complain as Job, "He hath fenced up my way, that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths?" They forget, surely, that this is a state of probation, where they are called to maintain their confidence in God, against all opposition. He is pleased to bring them into circumstances of perplexity and distress, for this very reason, that their dependence on him may be the more manifest, and he requires them to prove to the world, that they can trust him with their All.

The difficulties of Abram's situation were extreme, and only by a firm reliance on the divine promises was he enabled to surmount them. The efficacy of this principle appeared most evidently in him, as on some other occasions, so also in the instance before us. The command was express, that he should forsake his former abode, and all his connections in Chaldea. But though we may clearly understand the will of God, it is not always easy to obey it; nor shall we consent to hazard any thing by our obedience, till we can place an unreserved affiance in his word, who engages to protect us. In a trial of this kind, to consult with flesh and blood is at once to give up our faith.

The Patriarch, as we before observed, must have had much to struggle with. It must have cost him some painful feelings, to desert his country, and the
many

many dear relations who were left behind. The pilgrimage, on which he was required to enter, must have presented him with prospects of continual danger and distress. For such a pilgrimage he seemed utterly unprovided; and yet he was put upon it at a time of life, when men are not disposed to contend with difficulties, and when nature, in general, seeks rest and retirement. Had he attended to the suggestions of self-indulgence, or worldly prudence; or had he lost sight of the promise, he would instantly have desisted, and rejected the whole scheme as a rash, and foolish, and presumptuous undertaking. But this one thing determined and satisfied his mind, that the Lord had called him, had engaged to favour him with his gracious presence, and to bring him to a country, which should some time or other be given him for a possession; and therefore, “by faith—he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

With such a guide, what should we have to dread? But can we cheerfully rest on the word of God, and go forth to meet the severest trials, in this confidence, that “He will never leave us nor forsake us?” Does not Abram reprove us for our unbelief? What cowardice, what unfaithfulness do we betray, in the concerns of religion! The prospect of dangers and distresses terrifies many; the fear of want, or the love of ease makes them averse from a pilgrim’s life; and therefore, when they perceive what sacrifices must be made, they say, “I pray thee have me excused.”

Shall we accompany the pious Patriarch in his travels? We shall observe that in almost every situation

he was called to "endure hardness," though the favourite of Heaven. He was conducted in safety to the promised land, but not put into possession*. The Canaanites were to be spared for a longer season. The Lord, therefore, appeared to him in Canaan, engaging to give it, not to him, but to his posterity. This might seem to be a delay of the promise. But Abram was content to be "a stranger and a sojourner," and "had none inheritance, no not so much as to set his foot on †." He removed from place to place; and yet, every where, though in the midst of idolaters, he maintained his religion, and preserved the worship of the true God. Again and again it is remarked of him, that "he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord." This was a public testimony that he served the God of heaven; for, probably, he invited the neighbouring inhabitants to join with him in his devotions. Are we not hereby instructed, never to be ashamed of the profession of godliness, though we may live amongst those, who are enemies to it? Like Abram, let us cultivate the spirit of piety, wherever we are; nor think ourselves excused from religious duties, even upon necessary journeys; but, in all our removals, let us carry with us a sense of our obligations to God, and call upon his name.

A fresh trial arose. A grievous famine obliged Abram to desert the land of Canaan, and for a season to retire into Egypt. And here we might wish to

* Gen. xii. 6, &c. † Acts vii. 5.

throw a veil over some circumstances, which seem a reproach to his character. But if properly considered, it may be an instructive lesson to us, to observe imperfection in one of such exalted piety;—unbelief even in Abram. He gave way to a distrustful and very dishonourable fear, that he should be robbed of his beautiful wife, and himself fall by the hand of violence. To avoid this imaginary danger, he pursued those very steps, which actually brought him into it. He was guilty, if not of a direct falsehood, yet of a mean prevarication, in saying of Sarai, “She is my sister.” His faith, which a little before had surmounted very great trials, then failed him in a trifling difficulty. But his sin produced his punishment, Sarai was taken from him (upon the supposition of not being his wife) and on the very point of becoming the possession of Pharaoh. To what extreme distress, then, were Abram and his beloved partner reduced! But the Lord, who still watched over them for good, pleaded their cause, and procured their safe dismissal.

Surely this example will not be appealed to, in order to justify any base equivocations. We must condemn the conduct of Abram, and say, “Let every man speak the truth with his neighbour.” The only fair conclusion from it is, that there is no perfection to be found in any character, merely human, and that “in many things we offend all.” We may possibly stand against severe temptations, and yet fall by one comparatively inconsiderable. Our own foolish fears are sufficient, at any time, to seduce us from God, and to make us forget our best principles. This will
not

not afford any encouragement to the careless sinner, but it may, and should, "comfort the feeble-minded," who lament their frequent failings, or tremble at the remembrance of some foul misconduct. "Let no man glory in men," or depend on any wisdom or strength of his own! We have need to pray, "Lead us not into temptation! Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe; and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually!"

Abram returned to Canaan*, and, in a situation where he had formerly enjoyed the divine presence, he renewed his communion with God, who pardons the iniquity, and heals the backsliding, of his people. The Patriarch and his Relation Lot, who accompanied him, were both grown extremely rich; so that, on account of the vast increase of their flocks and herds, a separation from each other became expedient. The large addition, made to their substance, had nearly proved a cause of serious contention. Their servants at least could not agree together. And how frequently are the most grievous quarrels fomented by the domestics of different families, which would otherwise have lived in peace and friendship with each other! The conduct of Abram, upon this occasion, was most amiable indeed. In general we observe, that a proud and overbearing spirit, selfishness and avarice, accompany the increase of worldly possessions. But behold Abram's condescension to his nephew! See the Patriarch, with all his abundance, meek and loving, disinterested and generous! He said unto Lot, "Let there be no strife,

* Gen. xiii. 1, &c.

I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen: for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." What a striking lesson is this to us, to restrain an envious and haughty disposition, and to give up, even to an inferior, many just claims, for the preventing or the healing of contentions! Nor shall we repent of making such a sacrifice: whatever temporal advantages we may resign, we shall obtain an abundant recompence in the blessings of peace.

It was probably a trial to Abram to be separated from his Relation; but his loss was soon supplied by fresh communications of grace and comfort, which he received from above. The Lord renewed his promises to Abram, to confirm his faith and enliven his hope; and Abram again sealed his vows before the Lord. If this God be our God, and manifest his favourable presence with us, we shall not have much occasion to regret the absence of friends, or to be discouraged by their unkindness.

In another instance we are struck with admiration at the tender affection and generosity of Abram towards Lot*. Here indeed the Patriarch appears as a man of war: an unexpected change of character! With great vigour he girded himself for the battle, and went forth, with his numerous attendants, as an undaunted champion to chastise the insolence and the cruelty of some proud conquerors. But what could be his motive

* Gen. xiv. 1, &c.

for such an extraordinary proceeding? Not, *what* generally actuates the Soldier, the love of power, of riches, or of honour;—but a disinterested desire of rescuing his oppressed nephew, who had been taken captive from Sodom, and of restoring to him his liberty and his substance. This, under the divine protection, he soon effected. But behold his moderation, and his abhorrence of sordid gain, in the very hour of triumph! He pursued his victory no farther than to render justice to his injured Relation, and utterly refused to enrich himself by the spoils. Here, then, is an example of a noble mind, of one superior to any regard of private advantage, and it affords a lesson to all, “that no man should seek his own, but every man another’s wealth.”

Among those, who congratulated Abram on his late conquest, was one of high dignity, and yet of a mysterious character, Melchizedec, king of Salem. This person, it seems, was a worshipper of the true God, even in that idolatrous country, and performed the offices of a Minister of religion. He came out to testify his joy at Abram’s success; and mutual acts of kindness and respect were exchanged between them. Melchizedec brought forth his hospitable refreshment of bread and wine, typical of Gospel- blessings, and, as a Priest, pronounced the benediction of God upon the Patriarch. Abram in return acknowledged in the Priest the authority of God, and as a token of gratitude for his late victory, and as a confession that he owed his all to God, and would devote it to his service, “he gave him tithes of all.” Those, who worship the same God,

God, and are steadfastly attached to his cause, like these illustrious characters, should be cordially united to each other. Nor let persons of highest rank think it beneath them, either to "serve at the altar," or to pay a proper reverence to the Ministers of God, remembering whom they represent.

Let us pause awhile, and ask ourselves, with faithfulness and solemnity, Are we followers of Abram? Are we possessed of the same spirit? Are we influenced by his leading principles, faith towards God, and benevolence towards man? You bear no relation to Abram, if you despise or neglect the duties of religion, if you rear no altar, if you offer no sacrifice to God. Neither do you shew any resemblance to this example, whatever be your pretences to devotion, if you can make no concessions for the peace of your family or neighbourhood; if you are proud, selfish, and oppressive.

We have seen Abram, in obedience to the divine call, entering on the life of a pilgrim, and shall have occasion again to contemplate him in this state, while we further accompany him in his various removals. But now let us enquire, Have we obeyed the command of God? Or, in consequence of his requisition, have we given up any thing we should otherwise have possessed? We also, like Abram, are enjoined to live as strangers and sojourners. But have we not refused? Are we not determined to have as much of this world, as we can procure? Who amongst us "come out and are separate?" We are not indeed required to desert our place in society; but if we would
follow

follow Christ, we must not be "of the world, even as he was not of the world." For to us he declares, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*." Ah! how many reply, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" What judgment shall we form concerning you, ye gay, ye sensual, ye voluptuous? Is it true of you, that you are "not conformed to this world;" and that you are only as strangers, passing through it to a heavenly country? You would disclaim the insinuation as dishonourable to your character. Then be consistent; renounce your Christian profession, and avow it publicly, that you are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God," and that you will gratify your own carnal inclinations in contempt of all the precepts, or the threatenings of the Gospel.

* Luke xiv. 26.

A B R A M.

SECT. 2.

Abram entered into covenant with God—justified by faith—married Hagar—obtained a confirmation of the promises—named ABRAHAM—circumcised.

ABRAM, it appears, was designed for very eminent services, and distinguished by a title, expressive of the excellency of his character and of the high honour put upon him: for “he was called THE FRIEND OF GOD.” Some, perhaps, complain that they are not admitted to the same privileges as others, and arrogantly censure the divine conduct. They enquire therefore, why such singular marks of favour were bestowed upon Abram. But who are we, that we should presumptuously arraign the proceedings of the God of heaven? Shall we challenge Him to give account unto us of any of his matters, or dare to accuse him, as being partial in his regard? It is his prerogative to act in a sovereign manner, without control. All his dispensations, indeed, are ordered with wisdom, justice, and goodness. But “who hath been his counsellor?” He asks not our approbation, nor does he suffer us to sit as judges over the affairs of his government. He is debtor to no man. Let us confess, that his grace is his own; and that he is at liberty to distribute it, to whom, and in what proportion, he pleases. Is one distinguished above another, either by
temporal

temporal or spiritual blessings? Let not our eye be evil, because God is good. We admire and praise his mercy, which, in an abundant measure, has been exercised towards our polluted race. While none amongst us have any claim upon him, we wonder at his forbearance and condescension to all, and rejoice that he can receive any as the objects of his love.

Abram, we have already seen, was admitted to an uncommon degree of intimacy with the God of heaven. Almost every succeeding chapter presents us with some new vision, some gracious revelation, with increasing light and comfort, vouchsafed unto him. He had appeared, with much honour, as a soldier in the field of battle; but his highest glory was, that He, "who inhabiteth Eternity," was pleased to converse with him, as with an equal, and to enter into an express covenant with him. One remarkable instance of this kind is the very next circumstance, which occurs in the history*.

Years before
Christ, 1913.

It is probable that Abram, at the time here referred to, felt deep distress, through the influence of some unbelieving fears. Many years had elapsed, since he was first called out of Chaldea; and yet he had received no inheritance. He still continued a sojourner in a strange land, surrounded with those, from whom he had every reason to apprehend the most unfavourable treatment. We do not wonder, that even Abram was dejected in such a situation. But the Lord, who is ever attentive to the wants and trials of his people, and is ready to minister to their

relief and comfort, appeared to him to confirm the former promises, and gave him fresh assurances of his counsels of mercy: "Fear not, Abram," said the God of all grace; "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward:" or, in other words, "Whatever enemies thou mayest dread, I am thy sure defence, to ward off from thee every hostile assault; and whatever worldly advantages thou hast renounced, or mayest hereafter be deprived of, I will recompence the loss by affording thee a more abundant sense and enjoyment of my favour."

Was not this general declaration, then, sufficient to satisfy the Patriarch's mind? No: something further was requisite to remove his doubts: and as he was permitted, without reserve, to make known his requests unto God, he represented to him the painful feelings he had on this account, that he still remained childless, and that a stranger and a servant seemed likely to be his Heir. The ground of the complaint, probably, was not the mere desire of obtaining children of his own, but the difficulty he found in believing the promise, that he should have a numerous posterity to inherit Canaan, when as yet he had no Son. To take away that obstacle, the Lord engaged to give him a Son, and to "multiply his seed as the stars of heaven." This was enough. Abram's objections were silenced: his unbelief was overcome. He acquiesced in the assurance, and rested in cheerful dependence upon it. His faith was known and approved by God, who therefore testified his acceptance, and bestowed upon him fresh marks of regard.

Again it was declared, in order to establish his hope, that the same God, who had brought him out of Chaldea, would put him in possession of Canaan. Not as doubting the divine veracity, of which, it seems, he was then fully persuaded, but with eager desires of the promised blessing, he requested of God that some outward token, or memorial, might be given him of it. We are struck with wonder at the condescension of the Almighty God, who frequently accommodates himself to the wishes, and sometimes to the weaknesses, of his people. He admitted, that Abram should be gratified, and that the covenant should be confirmed with peculiar solemnities. For this purpose various sacrifices were prepared, that, according to the ancient custom of ratifying important contracts*, the two parties might testify their consent, and acknowledge their mutual engagements, by passing between the limbs of the animals, which were divided in the midst, and then placed in direct opposition to each other. Abram, on his part, was ready; and, while he waited in believing expectation of God's appearance, he sunk down into a deep sleep, and by an awful dread, brought over his mind, he was made to feel in whose presence he was; and in this situation it was revealed to him, what should befall his children for many generations after him. The glory of God was then manifested, and in a visible manner, as "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp," it passed between the separated pieces of the sacrifices; by which it was

* See Jer. xxxiv. 18.

understood, that The Most High pledged himself to Abram for the completion of his promises.

The whole transaction not only astonishes but instructs us. We perceive, in Abram, faith struggling against, and triumphing over unbelief. Wonder not, Believers, if you meet with seasons of darkness and distress. For probably, in most instances, where there is a real dependence upon God, there will be times of much fear and gloomy apprehensions. But it is not the will of God, that you should be cast down. He says to you, as to this holy Patriarch, "Fear not:" and all that he was to Abram, he will be to you. Did Abram rejoice in the prospect of a Son? You can exult, that the Son of Abram has appeared; and that in Him the Covenant, on which all your hopes are grounded, is established and ratified with the most awful solemnities, even by the shedding of his blood. Did Abram expect, from the divine promises, the blessings of an earthly Canaan? You have the same, or stronger, assurances, that you shall inherit the kingdom of glory.

It is not to be concluded, that Abram had no farther regard than to his immediate descendants and to a temporal possession. Doubtless he extended his views to the Saviour, who was to arise from his family, and to the heavenly Canaan. This we shall afterwards have occasion to observe. But we must not forget, that Abram, from the very circumstance here related, is proposed as a pattern to us, and as a representation of the only method in which God will justify a sinner, viz. by faith in Jesus-Christ. Abram was so justified; for it was "his faith," which "was counted unto

him for righteousness." All other means, indeed, of obtaining mercy, as they are absurd in themselves, are utterly unsuitable to us. But in the way of believing a free access is given us. This is adapted to our situation, as we are guilty, polluted creatures, and, in the strongest manner, encourages our hopes. For it is declared by an inspired Apostle, "It was not written for Abram's sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead *."

Years before
Christ, 1911. A son had been promised to Abram; but two years more elapsed, and no such event seemed likely to take place. It pleases God very frequently to defer that mercy, which he designs to bestow, in order to exercise our faith. But how difficult is it to maintain a firm dependence, when the blessing, we had been taught to expect, is long delayed! We are unwilling to wait for it: and our impatience may lead us to very wrong conclusions, as if our case were hopeless, or put us upon some improper conduct, to obtain what we eagerly desire.

Sarai was the first to be distressed by her own barrenness†; and, in order to remedy the evil, she proposed to Abram, that he should marry another wife, Hagar their maid-servant, whom they had brought from Egypt, that by her the family might be continued, and the numerous posterity promised might be raised up. The proposal was strange indeed, especially as coming from Sarai; nor is Abram's compliance with it justi-

* Rom. iv. 23, 24.

† Gen. xvi. 1, &c.

siable, but is rather to be considered as an evidence of weakness and folly. He had waited ten years already, from his removal out of Chaldea, and yet saw no prospect of any children. This was a painful trial. But why should we limit the Most High, or prescribe to Him the time, any more than the way, in which he must work?—It is not said, that in this case Abram sought direction from Heaven, but “He hearkened to the voice of Sarai.” Our nearest Relations will prove a dangerous snare to us, if we subject our conscience to their influence. If we are seduced out of the plain path of duty, it will be no excuse for us, that we listened to the solicitations of the dearest friends.

Probably Abram was impatient, as well as Sarai; and therefore, not merely in compliance to his wife, least of all from any sensual motives, but for want of a stronger faith, which would have enabled him to wait for the accomplishment of the promise, he became an example of Polygamy. But this instance, surely, will not justify the practice. Whatever might give rise to it, or however, in some dark ages and for particular purposes, it might be tolerated (in the same sense that the perverse manners of the Israelites were suffered, and the ignorance of the Heathens winked at*), we ought to have no doubt of its sinfulness. It is contrary to the original institution of marriage, according to our Lord’s explanation, and He has expressly declared, that it is now to be accounted no other than Adultery†. The bad consequences, in the case before us, clearly shew, that it was a most unad-

* See Matt. xix. 8. Acts xiii. 18. xvii. 30. † Mark. x. 11.

vifed ftep; for it laid the foundation of envy, jealousy, and bitter contentions in the family. We ftop not to confider the perverseneſs of Sarai towards Hagar, or her insolence to her miſtreſs, their complaints and their quarrels, which muſt have been extremely diſtreſſing to Abram: fuffice it to obſerve, that by Hagar he obtained a fon, but not the child of promiſe; a fon, for whom, indeed, great power and dominion were deſigned, but one, who inſtead of being a comfort to his father, was the cauſe of further diviſions and animofities in his houſe. So little do we know what we aſk for, when we deſire any thing out of God's way! The accompliſhment of our wiſhes may bring our puniſhment and prove a heavy curſe to us.

We haſten to the following chapter, which repreſents the Patriarch in a more amiable light, and in a far happier ſituation. We there behold in him, inſtead of unbelief, the moſt unreferved dependence on the promiſe: and he, whom we lately ſaw diſtracted with family broils, is now called up again to the mount of God, and holds the moſt familiar intercourſe with Heaven. "The Lord will not forſake his people," though he may leave them in darkneſs and diſtreſs for a ſeaſon, eſpecially after ſome ſpiritual declenſion, or ſome open violation of duty.

The Lord had made a ſolemn covenant with Abram, and had therein given him large expectations of a peculiar bleſſing, entailed upon his deſcendants. Still many circumſtances remained obſcure, and the birth of the promiſed Seed was purpoſely delayed, in order to try, and manifeſt, the faith of Abram. Perhaps, indeed,

he might flatter himself that Ishmael was the very son, who should prove an universal benefit to mankind. Having obtained Ishmael, the fond father might be satisfied, as if he had accomplished his wishes. For, after that event, we hear no expressions from him of any fervent desires to have another child. It should seem, then, that Isaac was bestowed, not in answer to the prayers of the parents, but through the rich and undeserved mercy of God alone. Let us behold and admire the divine grace and condescension, as well as reverence that power, to which nothing can be impossible.

Years before
Christ, 1898.

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, when Abram was NINETY-NINE YEARS old, and, therefore, when all hopes of any further increase of his family were cut off, the Lord came down to him, probably with some external manifestation of his glory, to renew, and more distinctly to explain, the promise, and also to declare, that the performance was near at hand*. How solemn upon this occasion was Jehovah's address, "I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect!" As if he had said, "I am the God, whose thou art, and on whom thou mayst securely depend. Possessed of omnipotence, I am all-sufficient for the completion of my engagements to thee. But remember thy obligations to me: persevere in thy obedience; live as in my presence; and be thou, entirely and without reserve, devoted to my service." What could Abram reply? He was silent before God; and, to testify the deep sense

Gen. xvii. 1, &c.

he had of his own meanness, "he fell on his face," and in this posture (most suitable to a sinner before the glorious majesty of Heaven) he waited for the further declarations of the divine will. The same assurances were then given him as before, only with additional clearness and strength of expression, that he should have a most numerous offspring, who should possess the land of Canaan. The Patriarch's name was also changed upon that remarkable occasion, by the direction of God himself. From that time he was called ABRAHAM; this new appellation being intended to put him in remembrance of the solemn contract, then made with him, and to be a continual pledge to him, that he should certainly be "the father of many nations."

As another memorial and confirmation of the Covenant, the painful operation of Circumcision was appointed for Abraham, and for all his male posterity. We enquire not into the particular reasons of that institution. It should suffice us, that it was an ordinance of God; and it ought to be observed, that it was typical of the work of God upon the soul, "the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh *," the circumcision of the heart, indispensably necessary for all the true members of the Church. The rite, as it was a sacrament which God himself ordained, was to be considered as a permanent token of his readiness to fulfil his engagement; and as it was submitted to on their part, it was a testimony of their acceptance of his mercy, and of their dependence on his promises.

* Col. ii. 11.

The revelation, then made to Abraham, was still more particular. He was given to understand, that the Covenant was not to be established in Ishmael, but in another Son, whom Sarai (from that time to be called SARAH, in remembrance of this transaction) should bear in the course of a year. The declaration, it seems, excited various affections in his mind. The condescension of God overpowered him; and again "he fell upon his face," to express his devout adoration. The intimation of the blessing proposed to him filled him with lively joy, and "he laughed," not in contempt or distrust, as Sarah afterwards did, but from the sudden emotions of pleasure. Yet some considerations would naturally rise, which might perplex his thoughts, and prove a severe trial to his faith. The event foretold appeared, humanly speaking, impossible, on account both of Sarah's age and of his own; and this difficulty he made known to God; "How shall it be?" His love also for Ishmael, and the idea which he had probably long entertained, that all the divine promises centered in him, might occasion no little conflict. Could he forbear exclaiming, What then shall become of Ishmael? Shall he be utterly rejected, and another supplant him? O that he might be the favoured Seed? "O that Ishmael might live before thee!"

But all objections were silenced, when the Lord solemnly repeated his declaration, that in twelve months, notwithstanding the apparent obstacles, Sarah should indeed bear a Son, with whom the Covenant, the everlasting Covenant, should be established, and that for
Ishmael's

Ishmael's posterity great temporal power and dominion should be secured. The Patriarch acquiesced, believed, and rejoiced; and to testify his faith and obedience, he immediately performed the rite appointed, upon himself and every male in his family; and thus the important Contract was sealed.

Can we help observing, not only that the ordinance of Circumcision was designed to be a mark of distinction to the Jews, but also that their continued practice of it to this day is a standing proof of the truth of the sacred history? For on no other supposition, can we account for their submission to the painful institution, and their long perseverance in it.

But what do we learn from this part of the life of Abraham? If God speak, let us humble ourselves before him, as did the holy Patriarch, and let us receive with dependence, thankfulness, and joy, the revelations of his love to us. And hath not God spoken? Yes: He, "who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son*."

The promises made to Abraham had respect to that great salvation, which is now fully revealed unto us. There was much obscurity, no doubt, in the dispensation given to him; and yet it was a dispensation of grace, and, in some sort, a publication of the Gospel. We are taught by the new testament to search, in the ancient scriptures, for intimations of the Redeemer, and of his unspeakable benefits. Of these things Abraham could not be ignorant, since Jesus

* Heb. i. 1, 2.

himself declared, " Abraham rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad *."

The Covenant, we have been considering, consisted of two parts. One was confined to temporal concerns, which engaged that the possession of the land of Canaan should be secured to Abraham's posterity. But besides this, there was another of a spiritual kind, and of a more extensive nature; spoken of, as it were, in connection with the former, and in a typical manner represented by it. It could not be overlooked, that from Abraham was to come One, who should be a blessing, not to the Jewish nation only, but to " all the families of the earth." This could not be a prediction of any merely civil Governor, however enlarged his dominion, or excellent his polity might be. It can be applied to none but Him, who is an universal Deliverer, and who alone can make all men truly blessed, by rescuing them from the power of Satan, and restoring them to God. This then was a clear declaration, that, though the Hebrews might be separated for a while, the partition wall should be thrown down, and the salvation of the Gospel proposed to all people.

Something more, surely, than worldly grandeur was designed for the child of promise ; or else, what peculiar favour did Isaac obtain ? If there was nothing spiritual secured by the Covenant to that branch of the family, just as much was given to Ishmael. But " the EVERLASTING Covenant," and " the EVERLASTING possession," carry our views beyond any thing,

* John viii. 56.

which the Jews ever received as a distinct Society; the "many nations," of which Abraham was to be the father, lead us to a more enlarged state of the Church, than they were intended to have; and when God says, "I will be their God," we may fairly understand it as expressive of every spiritual blessing, which He can bestow upon us, and of which the Gospel brings us the most certain assurances. We rejoice in St. Paul's explanation, so clear, so suitable, and so full of comfort to us: "The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise*."

Believers, then, of whatever nation or kindred they be, are "the children of Abraham:" "they walk in the steps of their father Abraham," and partake of the same privileges and the same happiness, to which he was admitted. But ah, how far short do we fall of this most eminent pattern! What distrust and misgivings we feel, though we have the same covenant, which Abraham had, revealed in a much clearer manner, and more abundantly confirmed! We have seen, how great were his difficulties, and that faith alone surmounted them. The instance, we have now considered, is particularly specified. "Against hope he believed in hope, that he might become the

* Gal. iii. 8, 14, 29.

father of many nations: according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God: and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, he was also able to perform*." Let us learn to complain no more of our little trials; but let us pray, " Lord, help our unbelief!"

Abraham submitted to the rite of Circumcision, which was a testimony of his dependence on the Covenant of grace; " a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised†." That ordinance is now abolished. But we celebrate another, which has succeeded it, and which is the standing means of admission into the Christian Church. And we, who bear this mark, should remember, what obligations are hereby laid upon us. For as " he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly," so neither is he a real disciple of Christ, who has no more than the external badge; and however he may have received the washing of water, he has no part in the salvation of the Gospel, without the spiritual Baptism, " the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost."

* Rom. iv. 18—21.

† Ver. 11.

A B R A H A M.

SECT. 3.

Abraham received all his excellence from God—visited by three Angels—interceded for Sodom—commended for the religious management of his family—prevaricated concerning his wife—rejoiced at the birth of Isaac—dismissed Hagar—sojourning in Philistia—required to offer up Isaac—comforted by promises of the Saviour—buried Sarah—procured a wife for Isaac—married again—died—received up to heaven.

THE delineation of excellent characters is sometimes thought to be a great discouragement to persons of weak and tender minds. These, it is said, when they observe the examples proposed to them so much superior to themselves, consider an imitation as impossible, which therefore they will not, in any measure, attempt. If, indeed, the attainments of the most illustrious saints are represented as entirely their own, independent on divine grace; and if others are required to copy after them in their own strength, there seems just ground for the objection. But if all their wisdom, faith, and holiness be, as they ought to be, described as the fruit of the Spirit, and as part of that “common salvation,” which all believers partake of in Jesus Christ, this surely will excite the most ardent desires, and the most lively hopes, of possessing, at least in some degree,

degree, the same spiritual blessings; and will therefore stir up the most languid to use all diligence in pursuing an object thus brought within their reach. Those, who have the deepest sense of their own inability, need not, ought not, to say, "This is too excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it." But while they perceive, in the most eminent patterns of righteousness, only the power and efficacy of divine grace, they should be encouraged to ask and expect the same assistance, that they may "go from strength to strength," and be "changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of our God."

It should also be remembered, that, in the scripture representation of the best characters, we observe their failings, as well as their excellencies, faithfully delineated. By an influence derived from above, which we also may obtain, they were enabled to exhibit a bright example of goodness; but, by frequent instances of imprudence and misconduct, they proved, that there was much depravity still remaining in them: and in this view they come nearer to a level with ourselves.

These will be suitable reflections, while we are contemplating the life of Abraham. The whole history describes him as One of high attainments in holiness, and as a peculiar favourite of Heaven. Yet even to this illustrious Patriarch it might be said, "Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou, that thou didst not receive?"

We have already accompanied him in some remarkable interviews, to which he was admitted with God himself; and some other, no less memorable, visions
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and revelations from the Lord are yet to be considered.

Years before
Christ, 1898.

Probably soon after the Covenant had been ratified by the ordinance of Circumcision, it pleased God to visit Abraham with a degree of familiarity, at which we stand amazed*. Laying aside the glory of his Majesty, He became a guest to his creature, and conversed with him, as it were, on terms of intimacy. Three Angels (and yet not all of them created Beings, for one was a divine Person, "the Angel of the covenant") appeared in the habit of men and strangers, whom Abraham, at first unacquainted with their real character, invited and importuned to partake of such hospitable refreshment, as his tent could afford them. The offer was accepted; and with great liberality a dinner was provided. Without commenting on the beautiful simplicity of the entertainment, so far removed from the pomp and profusion of modern times, we are constrained to admire, not only the condescension of these high personages, but also the generous, meek, and benevolent disposition of Abraham. We are taught by the Apostle, from this example, "not to be forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained Angels unawares†." An act of Christian kindness may sometimes be misplaced, but it "shall in no wise lose its reward." And not unfrequently, the recompence will be immediate, as in the case before us.

It was soon discovered, that these were more than common guests, and that they were of some superior rank, while they confirmed the promises lately given

* Gen. xviii, 1, &c.

† Heb. xiii. 2.

to Abraham, and declared the divine purpose, that Sarah should have a son. His faith probably was further established by this assurance; but his Wife was detected, laughing, as if in contempt or distrust of the message, and then prevaricating, to hide her unbelief. A firm confidence in God is the only sure preservative of real virtue.

To predict the birth of Isaac was not the sole end of this visit. It was intended also to reveal the decrees of God's vengeance against Sodom. While Abraham, therefore, was accompanying the Angels on their departure from his tent, in token doubtless of the utmost respect, these illustrious visitants separated from each other. Two of them directed their way towards Sodom, where the next chapter describes them. But the third, in a more particular manner, as it should seem, discovered his glory to Abraham, and was acknowledged by him as the Lord himself. The interview then became more interesting. This divine person testified his approbation of Abraham's character and conduct, and, as if he had been an equal, communicated to him the determination to destroy Sodom, and the cities around it. Such an awful desolation in his own neighbourhood, the good man could not hear of without extreme distress; and, with anxious desires to save his fellow-creatures from impending wrath, he undertook to become their intercessor. Emboldened by the condescension of God towards himself, he prayed earnestly, that the place might be spared, if but a few righteous persons should be found in it. This intercession of the Patriarch with God is described with in-

inexpressible simplicity. To enter into the proper spirit of it, the whole passage should be read and studied with attention. To comment upon it, would be to weaken its force and elegance. Come, and learn from Abraham, what compassion you should feel for sinners, and with what importunity you should put up your prayers for them! Come, and carefully observe, that you may copy after, the deep humiliation and the holy boldness of Abraham before God! For surely the same kind of address becometh us: "Behold now, I am but dust and ashes: O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak!" Come, and admire the rich mercy of God, who is "slow to anger," and declares that judgment is "his strange work!" He was pleased with Abraham's charitable petitions, and in answer to them engaged to spare the wicked for the sake of fifty righteous, if so many should be found there. The terms were brought lower and lower, till at length he promised, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake."

It appears throughout this interview, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Abraham, indeed, failed in his requests for the whole place, but in consequence of them Lot was miraculously delivered: "God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt*." Be encouraged, then, to expect, by your importunate intercession, the blessing of God upon your families, your friends, your neighbourhood. To this end, you must not only pray, but you must live,

* Gen. xix. 29.

like Abraham. Would you be favoured with gracious communications from God? You must faithfully serve him in your appointed station, as this Patriarch did. Let the divine testimony concerning him be well attended to: "I know him (said God) that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment."

What an useful lesson is this to parents and masters of families! In Abraham you perceive, what each of you should be. Very considerable was his charge: for not only was he taught to expect a numerous issue, but he had already a large train of attendants about him, above three hundred servants *, for whose spiritual welfare he felt a deep concern. It was his fixed determination, and a part of his domestic economy, to instruct all those, to whom his influence would extend, in the true knowledge of God. Nor was he satisfied barely with advising and warning, but he exercised his authority for the same salutary purposes, not suffering any, who were under his government, to neglect the worship of God, or to violate his precepts. It is not surely without a meaning to us, that his conduct herein was expressly marked by the divine approbation, and recompensed by further revelations made to him. How pleasing a sight is it, to see a house thus regulated in the fear of God! Are you, then, who are intrusted with such a charge, following the steps of Abraham? Are you aware, that the souls of your domestics are committed to your care; and that your power should

Gen. xiv. 14.

be exerted, in order to restrain sin, and promote true religion among them? You should have a church for God within your own walls, where daily sacrifices should be offered up to him. You plead your numerous engagements, as if they justified your omission of this duty. But you forget the instance before you, which proves, that, amidst the hurry of a very large family, it is possible for you to attend, not to your own only, but also to their spiritual interests.

Abraham was witness to the awful desolation of Sodom, and soon afterwards removed from that neighbourhood, perhaps dreading the judgments of God upon it; and then became a sojourner in the land of the Philistines*. But here again, as before in Egypt, he betrayed a want of faith, in the fears which he entertained concerning his wife; and in consequence of his shameful prevarication he was in great danger of losing her. We perceive then, it is not enough to repent of former sins, we must guard against a relapse. For probably the same temptations will occur again, which have already prevailed over us; and, though restored, we are still liable to fall.

How can we expect those schemes to prosper, which take their rise from our unbelief! It is in mercy that God breaks our purposes, to humble us for our want of faith. Thus Abraham was punished: yet the Lord withdrew not his favour from him. Even in Philistia, and soon after this offence, he put an honour upon him, and made the inhabitants to spare and to reverence him. "He suffered no man to do him wrong;

* Gen. xx. 1, &c.

yea, he reprov'd kings for his sake *". To the divine influence upon the minds of Abimelech and his people, we must ascribe the kindness which Abraham met with, so contrary to what he looked for. Let us be ashamed of our fears! How often has the Lord graciously disappointed them, and given us acceptance and success, where we foreboded nothing but opposition and destruction!

Years before
Christ, 1897.

At length Isaac was born, as had been foretold, and the completion of the promise, so evidently miraculous, filled the parents with gratitude and joy †. But, in a little while, the happiness of the family was disturbed. Jealousies and contentions arose about the children of the different mothers; and to prevent further animosities, Abraham was reduced to the very painful necessity of dismissing the bondwoman and her son, that the inheritance might be the indisputable property of the child of promise. Alas! what is human life! What a mixture of bitterness is there in our sweetest draughts! Our very comforts frequently produce much anguish of spirit. Isaac is born, but Ishmael and his mother must be banished. Let us not look for perfect and uninterrupted felicity, till our pilgrimage be ended. Perhaps the distresses, which Abraham felt upon this occasion, were designed as a punishment for his hasty and unadvised marriage with Hagar, as they were certainly the consequences of it. We know not where the bad effects of one sin may cease. Does not this consideration warn us, "to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise?"

* Psa. cv. 14.

† Gen. xxi. 1, &c.

The Philistines, we have seen, were made to reverence Abraham, and, while they were constrained to acknowledge the blessing of God was with him, their very King courted his alliance, and sought his protection. A quarrel had nearly been excited between them about the possession of a well; (and the most inconsiderable grievances, or even suspicions, may give rise to serious and destructive contentions;) but, through the mild and peaceable dispositions of the two parties, the matter was no sooner represented, than a reconciliation was effected, and mutual expressions and assurances of kindness passed between them. How good is it, to beware of the beginning of strife! How amiable, to “seek peace and ensue it!”

In Philistia Abraham seemed to fix his abode, and to prepare a settlement, not for himself only, but for his son after him. “He planted a grove in Beer-sheba.” Probably, indeed, the plantation was designed (like “the high places” which were used in succeeding ages) for the purpose of public worship. For here he made an open profession of godliness, and “called on the name of the Lord.”—And ought not we also, wherever we sojourn, to serve the God of Abraham? We are favoured with external privileges far superior to what this illustrious saint enjoyed. But do we not discover an impious contempt and abuse of them? Do we frequent the place which is set apart for God, and gladly embrace every opportunity of calling on his name? What, though we dwell among such as are strangers to Him? This surely will not justify a neglect of religious duties; but it should rather excite
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in us a more zealous attention to them, that we may recommend them to others.

Abraham now appeared to be settled in a state of tranquillity. But his trials were not ended. Nay, the greatest of all remains to be considered: yet, like other trials of the faithful servants of God, this was designed to display the abundant grace of God in him, and to give him fresh assurances of the divine favour.

Years before
Christ, 1872.

Long time he continued in Philistia, it is supposed till Isaac had attained his five and twentieth year, before he was brought to the very distressing scene, which we are now called to witness. The bare narration of the facts, contained in this short history, must awaken the tenderest feelings in every heart. "God did tempt Abraham*." It is not possible, that a God of purity can suggest an evil thought or desire to the mind of any of his creatures. In that sense "he tempteth no man." But in a very proper acceptation of the word, "he tempted Abraham," that is, he proved or made trial of him, in the instance before us, requiring a signal testimony of his sincerity.

Had not this been fully manifested upon former occasions? Yes; his firm dependence on God, and entire devotedness to him, had appeared in his readiness to quit his native country, and in his patient reliance upon the promises, during a dangerous and distressing pilgrimage of very many years. But never were these graces of his character so remarkably exercised, nor was

* Gen. xxii. 1, &c.

their excellency ever so clearly seen, as in the affecting history, which is now brought to our view.

Is it asked again, why God should demand an evidence of that, which he is already assured of? The question is presumptuous; and on the very same grounds we might undertake to censure the general conduct of God towards all his servants, as well as in the case of Abraham. He proves them, partly for their benefit, even as gold and silver are tried, to purge away their dross; and partly for the advantage of others, to whom he thus makes known what he has done for his people, and what he can enable them both to do and to suffer for his sake. Such was the test, to which Abraham was called; in which we are at a loss to assert, whether his faith or his obedience shone the brighter. Most undoubtedly, the strength and efficacy of his faith appeared in the readiness with which he obeyed that particular precept, of all others the most difficult and distressing we can possibly conceive.

The Lord said, "Take now thy Son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Every word seemed intended to awaken all his parental feelings; and then it was required that he should do violence to them, in taking away the life of his beloved Isaac. This was a trial of a most complicated sort, in which many difficulties were involved. Isaac was his Son,—then his only Son,—endeared to him by various circumstances,—granted to him as a peculiar favour,—in answer to much prayer,—and after long expectation,—out

of the common course of nature,—the support and comfort of his declining years. This was not all, nor even the chief consideration. Isaac was the child of promise, on whom the blessings of the Covenant were entailed, and from whom the Saviour of the world was to arise. Yet Isaac must be delivered up. The Lord God, who at first bestowed the gift, demanded it back again. But in what manner must he be forced from his father? Not by a natural death; though, in any the easiest way possible, the loss of a son, and of such a son as Isaac, would have been extremely painful. But he must fall by the hand of violence. Shall not the father, then, hide his face from the bloody scene? No; he must be witness to the slaughter;—he must himself be the executioner. But whence could such a command be issued? Not surely from the God of love, not from Him, “who keepeth Covenant and Mercy?” Yes, from Him: It was His voice (who will do what is right, and whose power is irresistible) which said, “Offer up thy Son.” And Abraham believed, and obeyed.

It were presumptuous for us, either to censure or to vindicate the divine conduct upon this extraordinary occasion. It becometh us with devout adoration to confess, “Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known*.” It must be concluded, that Abraham had sufficient evidence that this was indeed a revelation from God, so as to preclude all fears of a mistake, and to silence all objections, which might offer themselves to his mind.

* Pl. lxxvii. 19.

Yet how amazing the firmness of the Patriarch ! Does his parental affection plead for Isaac's life ? No ; he submits, because the authority of God must not be opposed, and nothing, which He requires, must be withheld. Does faith itself stagger at the command, as inconsistent with the express engagements of God himself ? Does the thought arise, Isaac must not be sacrificed, lest the Covenant itself be broken, and the Saviour, designed to bless the world, never appear ? But, whatever unbelief may suggest, Abraham maintains his confidence, that, though he cannot possibly reconcile the promise with the precept, the Lord will find out a way to do it. " He hath said it, and therefore he will make it good, that in Isaac shall the 'Covenant be established. Isaac may die, but the word of God cannot fail. Though my son be deprived of life, by the divine power he may and will receive it again. It becomes me, then, without hesitation to acquiesce, and to obey, in this expectation, that, painful as the trial is, the issue will redound to the glory of God, and my own exceeding joy."

Such would be the conclusions of a lively faith : and with impressions like these, behold the aged father prepare for the tremendous business assigned him ! The injunction had probably been given in the visions of the night ; and " early in the morning" (to testify his ready compliance) without " conferring with flesh and blood," or revealing his purpose to any one, that he might not be prevented by the tenderness or unbelief of others, he set forwards upon his journey for the appointed place, together with his beloved son. Nor was this merely a hasty motion, but confirmed by subsequent

sequent reflection. For three days successively, having continually in view "the desire of his eyes," he persisted in his determination to sacrifice him to the God of heaven, and still retained his confidence, that "the everlasting Covenant" could not fail.

At length they arrived at the mount, which the Lord himself had marked out for this amazing transaction. Isaac, unacquainted with the design, had proposed a most affecting question, which might have disconcerted one of the strongest resolution, "My father, where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" But Abraham wavered not: probably not understanding his own prediction, he replied, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." The altar was built, and the wood disposed in order. The divine command must then have been revealed to Isaac, who, without resistance, immediately submitted to be bound, and to be laid upon the altar as a victim, "appointed to death." We say not, what endearments must have passed between the father and the son, before their expected separation. Suffice it to observe, that the sacrifice was, in effect, offered up. For, behold "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son."

This was enough. Abraham had been tried, and his heart was found upright with the Lord. Isaac therefore was rescued by the divine interposition, in the awful moment, when he seemed to have taken his leave of life. The Angel of God called from heaven, and declared his approbation of Abraham's conduct. A Ram, miraculously provided for the very purpose, was substituted

substituted and presented to God in Isaac's stead. In order to testify the Patriarch's gratitude, to be a memorial of the Lord's goodness, and to encourage believers in every succeeding age, the place was distinguished by a new and significant name, "JEHOVAH-JIREH;" in the mount of difficulty the Lord will be seen. This was the very mount, on which the Temple was afterwards built, and sacrifices offered to God continually; near to which, also, the Son of God, then represented by Isaac, did actually bleed and die, as an atonement for the sins of the world.

The trial being ended, Abraham was immediately recompensed with divine consolations, and the highest expressions of God's favour towards him. The Covenant was again renewed with him in a stronger manner, and clearer intimations were given of the Redeemer who was to arise from his family. The Lord God "interposed himself by an oath:" "By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord:" no greater sanction can possibly be conceived.

In these gracious declarations to Abraham we are interested, not merely as they may encourage us to persevere in obedience, from the confidence that, like this illustrious Patriarch, we also in due time shall be approved and rewarded, but chiefly as they are the ground of our eternal hopes; the faithfulness of God being hereby pledged for the acceptance and salvation of every believer in Jesus Christ. For this is that "oath which He swore to our father Abraham," (on which Zacharias commented) "that he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might

might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life *." This also is the Apostle's explanation of the oath, by which God has confirmed unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, "that we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us †."

Do we wonder at Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his beloved son? What, then, shall we say to the love of God the Father, who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all?" Shall we feel no returns of gratitude to Him, who not only gave his only-begotten Son to die for our offences, but, in a way which we pretend not to explain, was pleased "to bruise him ‡?" What now can He withhold from us? O let us admire, and praise, and trust, and serve him, continually crying, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!"

Is it enquired, To what are we to ascribe the firmness of Abraham upon this trying occasion? Undoubtedly to his fixed dependence upon God. For "BY FAITH Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure §." By the same principle alone, we shall be enabled to give up all for God, to withstand the most violent temptations, and to per-

* Luke i. 73—75.

† Heb. vi. 17, 18.

‡ Isa. liii. 10.

§ Heb. xi. 17—19.

severe in holiness through the severest sufferings. The example of Abraham, therefore, is produced by another Apostle to prove, that a steadfast obedience will "necessarily spring out of a true and lively faith," and that it is the grand evidence of a Christian's sincerity. "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect*?"

There is not, as some have supposed, an opposition or inconsistency between St. Paul and St. James, though the former declares Abraham was justified by faith alone, the latter that he was so by works. Upon a fair and serious attention to them it will appear, that the two Apostles do not contradict each other, for they write upon different occasions, address themselves to different persons, and treat on different parts of the great system of revelation. St. Paul maintains, that our justification before God cannot arise, in any measure, from our own obedience, and refers us to the case of Abraham, whose "faith was counted for righteousness." This position, of the highest importance in Christianity, is not denied by St. James, who insists only, that, if we have the faith to which salvation is annexed, it must be productive of real holiness before men; and therefore, that our sincerity must be evidenced, or justified, in the sight of our fellow-creatures, by "the fruits of righteousness." Such was the example we are considering. Abraham had been received into a state of favour with God many years previous

* James ii. 21, 22.

to the transaction now described; which could not, therefore, be the ground of his acceptance; but by this act of obedience he might, in a proper sense, be said to be justified, not as meriting forgiveness, but as exhibiting his real character, and fully manifesting his integrity. For an undeniable testimony was hereby given of the truth and excellency of his religious principles, which clearly appeared to be more than the empty profession of an hypocrite. Thus "by works was faith made perfect," it was found upon trial to be genuine, to have answered its end, and to possess an entire influence over him.

Does not this instance, then, speak loudly to us? Let us not be satisfied with a mere historical belief of the scriptures, or a cold assent to the doctrines of the Gospel. This will produce no salutary effect. If we have Abraham's faith, we must prove it by imitating Abraham's obedience. Can we, then, cheerfully give up our dearest enjoyments, when God requires them? Are we not staggered by difficulties, or the prospect of suffering? Are not many, therefore, by the subject before us, convicted of hypocrisy? If you quarrel with the strictness of the command, and refuse to obey it, talk not of your dependence on the promise. If you say, you have hope in the Covenant, and yet go not forth to the work, which God has enjoined you, be assured you are deceiving your own souls. You have not received the blessings of Redemption.

Years before
Christ, 1860.

The sequel of Abraham's history does not present us with any very striking incidents. The time at length arrived, when Sarah, who had been

his beloved companion, probably from an early age, must be taken from him*. The separation, though at an advanced period in life, was painful to Abraham. He mourned and wept for Sarah. Nor are such expressions of grief unfuitable to the character of a wise and good man. Particular mention is made of the burial of Sarah; because for that intent a field, with a cave in it, was purchased of the inhabitants of the land, and thus Abraham began to receive the completion of the promise, by obtaining a possession in Canaan.

Years before Christ, 1857. It is pleasing to observe the father's concern for the prudent marriage of his son†.

The charge which he gave to his servant to prevent any alliance of this kind with the idolatrous Canaanites, and his very earnest directions to procure him a wife from his own Relations, whilst they discover Abraham's faith and piety, are an instructive lesson to parents, to encourage those connections in their families, which are likely, not so much to increase their wealth or worldly interests, as to promote the great purposes of religion.

Years before Christ, 1853. After this event, Abraham himself entered again into the married state‡. As his bodily strength was miraculously renewed, and still continued to him, at a very late period he had six more sons. To each of these he gave a separate portion, and (in order to prevent jealousy and confusion among his children) he dismissed them to different places; but to Isaac he assigned the chief of all his substance. His temporal concerns being settled, "he died in a good

* Gen. xxiii. 1, &c. † xxiv. 1, &c. ‡ xxv. 1, &c.

Years before
Christ, 1842. old age," having lived one hundred and seventy-five years, and was buried in the very cave which he had purchased and prepared for Sarah. Such must be the close of all the changes in human life. Some may have a longer, others a shorter space; but all are hastening to the grave; and there our pilgrimage will cease.

From an earthly, we are assured, Abraham was removed to an heavenly Canaan, and received into the immediate presence of that God, who had been his guide and his defence from his youth up. "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked for a city, which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*." In that glorious society above, he is now distinguished. Long after his decease, the Lord speaks of him as still existing with himself, saying, "I am the God of Abraham†;" whence Jesus Christ argues, that Abraham yet lives unto God‡. He possesses a place of peculiar honour in the mansions of the blessed, nor can we desire any higher felicity for ourselves, than "to sit down with him in the kingdom of heaven§."

Where, then, are the followers of Abraham? Who are they, that worship Abraham's God? Let us not complain, that we are not favoured with the same revelations, which were granted to this Patriarch. Our opportunities and means of instruction are not less, but

* Heb. xi. 9, 10.

† Exod. iii. 6.

‡ Matt. xxii. 32.

§ Matt. viii. 11.

greater than his were. He saw the day of Christ, but he saw it at a distance. To us the Saviour, the promised Seed of Abraham, has appeared; and we are called to partake of all the blessings, which He bestows. But, if we be joined to Christ, we must renounce the world, with all its pomps and vanities, and, like Abraham, we must be as "strangers upon earth." Ah! how few answer to this description! The generality of mankind determine to enjoy as much of sensual pleasures as lies within their reach, and grieve they can have no more.—But let those, who are seeking a better country, hold on their way, rejoicing in the confidence, that the God of Abraham is their God; "He will be their guide unto death, and their portion for ever."

L O T.

C H A P. VI.

Lot attended Abram in his pilgrimage—separated from him—chose his abode at Sodom—grieved and persecuted there—taken prisoner, but rescued by Abram—visited by two Angels—led out of Sodom—petitioned for Zoar—lost his wife—fled from Zoar—betrayed into drunkenness and incest.

WHILE we are attentively surveying the examples, which are recorded in the holy scriptures, it should be our endeavour, not only to admire and imitate whatever is excellent in them, but also to mark their respective failings, in order that we may avoid the evils, which we condemn. In these writings human nature is faithfully delineated: we need not add, that they have given no very favourable views of it. Even those, who are truly religious, and are, upon the whole, under the influence of right principles, exhibit, in their various imperfections, a very melancholy proof, that we are in a fallen state, extremely depraved, and continually prone to depart from the ways of God. This conclusion may excite disgust, as it calls for the deepest humiliation, but it is fairly drawn, and seems to force itself upon us, from facts the most undeniable, from universal history, and particularly from the lives,

which are described in the Bible, not merely of the most abandoned, but of the best of our species. Can we forbear exclaiming, "If those, who are renewed in the spirit of their minds, who deny themselves, and watch, and pray, are yet so defective in duty, and are with difficulty restrained from gross abominations, what would man be, if left entirely to himself, without instruction and without restraint?"

Such reflections as these will naturally suggest themselves, and may be improved to great advantage, while we contemplate the character of Lot: a character, that we must allow to have been upright and valuable, but perhaps not the most eminent among the saints; for, though the general tenour of it will demand our approbation, we shall meet with some parts in it, which are most reproachful. It will become us, however, to look attentively into ourselves, while we are examining his conduct; nor let us be satisfied with knowing what Lot was, but enquire what we are, and what manner of persons we ought to be. It may be useful to consider the scripture account of him,

I. Before he fixed his abode at Sodom. It should seem, that early in life, having lost his father Haran, he was taken under the care of Abram, his father's brother, before the call of that Patriarch. Being so intimately connected with him, he could not but be acquainted with that extraordinary revelation, by which Abram was separated from his idolatrous countrymen, that he might serve the true God. It appears, that

Years before
Christ, 1921. Lot also was influenced by grace, to share with him the difficulties of a long and dangerous

gerous pilgrimage. He was Abram's companion from place to place, under the same divine guidance and protection, and joined with him in the worship of the God of heaven*. It is an unspeakable privilege to be of one household with those, who know and love God. To the example, the instructions, and the prayers of a pious parent, relation, or friend, many will ascribe it, that they have been rescued from a state of ignorance and profaneness here, and from everlasting misery hereafter. O value your opportunities, and labour to improve them, if you are fixed in a situation so favourable to religion!

While Lot continued to be a fellow-traveller with Abram, he not only possessed some property of his own, but received an abundant increase of his substance †. Ah! how few can bear prosperity! This, it should seem, proved a snare to Lot. A contention arose, in which, as we have seen, Abram discovered an amiable, meek, and disinterested spirit; but the same liberality did not appear in Lot. He, therefore, separated from his honoured Relation, probably upon the plan of becoming richer. How wretched a choice did he make, and how different the society which he sought! "He pitched his tent toward Sodom;" though it is added, (and he must soon have perceived their character) "The men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." By what motive, then, was he influenced? We fear, he was led by the love of gain. Though an upright servant of God, he seems to have been too much under the power of a selfish and

Gen. xii. 5. † xiii. 5, &c.

covetous disposition. It is remarked, therefore, that he was tempted by the fruitfulness of the land; and probably, he was too eager to seize the opportunity of increasing his wealth, without considering to what snares he exposed himself. "He lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, even as the garden of the Lord." He chose that situation, then, because it was suitable to his flocks and herds, though extremely unfavourable to the growth of real religion.

Shall we not condemn this eager attachment to worldly interest, this want of attention to spiritual concerns, even in a good man? To what end, we may ask, did Lot forsake his native country, since he fixed his abode again among idolaters, among sinners of the most audacious kind? Where was his zeal for God, when, not from necessity but from lucrative views, he took up his habitation there, where wickedness seemed to have attained its highest pitch? In him, therefore, we behold an example of one, who, though he did not entirely give up his religion for the sake of present advantages, yet acted inconsistently with his own character and profession, by forming needless connections with ungodly men.

And are there none, in our own day, who, though possessed of the best principles and purposes, are much hindered, from carrying their own good intentions into effect, by a covetous spirit? Are there not those, who greedily run into temptation, in order to promote their paltry gains, and are thereby drawn into great difficulties, though they may still, perhaps, upon the whole,

whole, maintain the hope of the Gospel? It becomes them surely, who are the followers of Jesus, to have a continual regard to something higher, than merely their own welfare in the present life. Is not the prosperity of the soul to be consulted? And may not this, in some measure, depend upon the society of those, whose friendship we court? It is utterly improbable, that they should make any proficiency in religion, or bring any credit to the Christian name, who choose their abode, and enter into the closest intimacies, from carnal motives only, without enquiring after any spiritual advantages. How suitable upon this occasion is the Apostle's observation, and how frequently has it been verified by sad experience! "They, that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows *."

After such an imprudent choice, shall we meet with any thing favourable in the sequel of Lot's history? Yes; it will appear that he maintained his integrity, if we consider him,

II. During his residence in Sodom. Even there we shall discover much in his character that was truly excellent. In that abandoned place, solicitations to evil must have been continually urged upon him; but he was not so carried away by an attention to his worldly interest, as to make conscience truckle to his

* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

gain, or to be ashamed of his religion. He was preserved from the wickedness, universally practised around him; and he even stood forth as a bold reprover, warning sinners of their danger, though it should seem, that, in this respect, he had not one to countenance or support him. We are pleased to observe, that his very strong abhorrence of sin was not lessened by the frequency and effrontery of those most flagrant iniquities committed on every side, which he must have daily witnessed. Such is the Apostle Peter's testimony concerning him: "He was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds*."

Do our outward circumstances resemble those of Lot?—Our case may be exactly similar (and from necessity, perhaps, not from choice), but while we live among them, who are enemies to God, are we preserved from "following their pernicious ways?" Do we feel, as we ought, an abhorrence of their evil practices? Do not many continually look upon the grossest enormities of conduct with the utmost indifference, and take "pleasure in those that do them?" Do not some profess to act upon the compliant principle, of conforming to the customs of the place or the company they are in; and suppose themselves justified, by the fashion of the times, in habits of the most dangerous tendency, if not openly immoral? It is obvious, that, upon this plan, as Lot might have sinned, so he would have perished, with the men of Sodom.

* 2 Pet. ii. 7, 8.

Lot, however, was justly punished for the choice he made. The very end, for which he was induced to fix his residence at Sodom, was entirely defeated. Alas! how can we expect those schemes to prosper, which have the love of gain for their foundation? The Lord is pleased, in mercy, to disappoint the designs of his children, in order to humble them for what has been wrong in their spirit. He therefore brings them into trials, to rescue them from those snares, which might prove fatal to their souls; and thus he preserves them from apostasy.

We behold Lot, then, a stranger to comfort in Sodom. However lucrative the situation was, it could not but be most distressing to him. He had those scenes continually before his eyes, which were the occasion of extreme anguish to his mind. The concern he felt for the dishonour done to God, and for the horrible state of the wicked, was not less affecting to him, than the hatred and persecution to which he himself was exposed.—But did he find his account in the fruitfulness of the soil? No; he was far from reaping those advantages, even in this respect, which might have been expected. A contention arose among the neighbouring kings; and, Sodom being taken and plundered, Lot was suddenly deprived of all his substance, and himself became a captive, in the possession of an enemy*. A remarkable deliverance indeed was obtained by means of Abram's bold and vigorous exertions; but Lot, having recovered his liberty and his property, returned to his abode at Sodom, as if he felt an undue attachment to

* Gen xiv. 12.

the place, and were loth to be forced away from it. Did his latter end, then, prove more prosperous? No; instead of securing to himself an abundance of riches, he suffered the loss of all, and even his life was given him for a prey. We shall observe, that, though the Lord “visit the transgression of his children with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes,—nevertheless, his loving kindness he will not utterly take from them*.” This will appear, while we consider the case of Lot,

III. In his dismissal from Sodom. An astonishing history is here presented to us, and it becomes us, with a peculiar seriousness, to contemplate the Lord’s interposition in rescuing his servant and destroying his enemies. “Come and see the works of God: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men!”

Years before
Christ, 1898.

The Lord’s designs of taking vengeance upon this abandoned city were revealed, first to Abraham, and soon afterwards, in the same condescending manner, to Lot. Two of those exalted personages, who had been Abraham’s guests, directed their way to Sodom (as it were to make enquiry into the state of the place), and there complied with the very pressing invitations of Lot, to partake of his hospitality†. This is recorded, as an honour to the character we are considering, and as an encouragement to us “to entertain strangers.” We need not here enlarge on Lot’s benevolent reception of them, though their high dignity was concealed from him, on the violence of the men of Sodom both against him and his visitants, or on the divine judgments inflicted upon those

* Pl. lxxxix. 32, 33.

† Gen. xix. 1, &c.

finners,

sinners, who were instantly struck with blindness. But we must not forget the gracious regard, which the Angels discovered towards Lot, as it furnishes us with the strongest testimony in his favour. They took up their abode in his house, they rescued him out of the hands of those, who with horrible lewdness and murderous rage were assaulting him, and then they declared to him the purpose of God, which they themselves were come to execute, exhorting him to save himself and his relations from the impending ruin, inasmuch as the whole place was about to be given up to utter destruction.

These were tremendous tidings indeed! What painful feelings must have been excited in Lot's mind! What distress and anguish must have oppressed his spirit, not so much on his own account, as on that of all around him, who were very shortly to be consumed in one common conflagration! Anxious to preserve every branch of his own family, he hastened to warn his sons-in-law of their danger, and to press them to fly from the storms of wrath, just ready to be poured upon them. And how did he succeed? His admonitions were rejected with scorn, and he was laughed at, as little better than a fool or a madman.

Can we forbear pausing to reflect on the hardness and impenitence of the carnal heart, when confirmed by long and unrestrained habits of wickedness? No warnings are effectual to awaken its fears, no judgments sufficient to soften its obduracy. It is daring enough to deride the most terrible denunciations, to defy

defy the fierce anger of the Lord, and even to challenge Omnipotence itself to do its worst. There are that say, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work that we may see it; and let the counsel of the holy one of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it*." Thus it was that Enoch's and Noah's preaching was despised; and thus the greater part of the Lord's prophets were ridiculed and abused for their kind and faithful exhortations. Nor should the minister of Christ in this day wonder, or be discouraged, if his zealous exertions to save souls be treated with the utmost contempt, and he seem to his hearers "only as one that mocks."

What then was the issue? The Angels were urgent upon Lot to fly from the devoted city, with those of his family whom he had under his command, his wife and two daughters. The departure must not be delayed; the fire from heaven is coming down upon the place. But how distressing, to leave all his substance, and many dear relations to be consumed in the flames! Lot therefore "lingered," as if unwilling to take his last farewell; and if the Lord God had not been merciful to him, he himself would have perished with the ungodly. But the Angels laid hold upon his hand, and upon that of his wife and his two daughters, and led them out, as if by a gracious compulsion they would rescue him against his will. Then they pressed it upon him to escape for his life, without hesitating a moment, or even casting a look behind him.

* Isa. v. 19.

Is it not thus, that the Lord God separates his people from the society of those, who lie under his wrath, ready to be consumed in their iniquity? He calls and exhorts; but they are backward to obey, or even to listen to his voice. They trifle with their convictions, and, influenced by this or the other worldly consideration, they are unwilling to be converted; till He put forth his power, and constrain them, as he did Lot, to follow his guidance, though it should be with the loss of all things. It may, therefore, be justly said of every one redeemed to God, as of Lot, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire*?"

Lot was directed to betake himself to the mountainous country at some distance: and, as the Lord himself had engaged to be his leader, he might surely have travelled with confidence. But, overwhelmed with fear and distress, and encouraged by the kindness of God in his favour, he petitioned that his journey might be shortened, and that he might be permitted to dwell in Zoar, a small neighbouring city, which otherwise, it seems, would have perished with Sodom. This is a circumstance, not less surprising than any in the whole history. Zoar was spared at the request of Lot, the Lord condescending even to his infirmities; and it is recorded, as one proof among many, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." What will not such prayer obtain? In the case before us, it preserved the lives of multitudes, and stayed the hands of Omnipotence itself. The vengeance hanging over Sodom was delayed, till Lot had safely arrived in

* Zech. iii. 2.

Zoar. What words were those, "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither!"

At length the denunciations of wrath were executed, to their full extent, in the total subversion of Sodom and several other neighbouring towns. The inhabitants continued their sensuality, regardless of their danger to the last moment; "They did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded: But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all*." A tremendous representation this, both of the state in which ungodly sinners will be overtaken, "when the Son of man shall be revealed," and also of that everlasting destruction which awaits them in the world to come! Who, then, will not dread the justice of an angry God? For do we not perceive, that He is indeed "a consuming fire?" It seems, that He would gladly have spared that filthy generation. He had said, "I will not destroy it for ten's sake." But, only one righteous person being found among them, and the rest being altogether abandoned, He determined to repress their shameless impieties, by such an awful display of his vengeance, as would manifest his hatred of sin to all ages. The whole country around, to a considerable extent, was entirely desolated, and not only rendered unfit for cultivation, but has ever since been a lake of malignant and offensive waters†.

* Luke xvii. 28, 29.

† See Deut. xxix. 23.

Here, then, we behold, that God is true to his word, and that he will execute, as well as denounce, his threatenings against sinners. We discover the heinousness, as of other transgressions, so particularly of fornication and of all uncleanness. But, as lust is generally incited and cherished by the indulgence of other vile habits, we are hereby warned of our danger in giving way to any of those affections or practices, which may draw such terrible consequences after them. "Behold, this was the iniquity of Sodom (saith the Lord), Pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away, as I saw good *." Saint Jude adds, "they are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire †."

Ah! to how many in a Christian land may it be said, "Sodom hath not done, as thou hast done ‡!" What one sin was found in Sodom, which does not prevail among ourselves? And do not our superior mercies, privileges, and instructions aggravate our guilt? We know who has taught us, "That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment," than for those, who hear and despise the Gospel §.

But strong consolation is hereby suggested to the faithful followers of Christ. You have been contemplating with wonder, love, and praise, the divine inter-

* Ezek. xvi. 49, 50. † Jude 7. ‡ Ezek. xvi. 48.

§ Matt. xi. 24.

position in favour of just Lot. O learn from it, to trust yourselves, without reserve, to the care and protection of Him, who is ever mindful of his people, and almighty to deliver them! It is recorded for your encouragement, though your situation for the present be most dangerous and distressing. Since He, who had but one servant in Sodom, would not suffer him to perish in the general ruin, we are instructed, that "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished*."

It remains that we consider Lot,

IV. After his departure from Sodom. The question recurs, What did he gain by this fruitful soil? If, as we have supposed, he was led thither by the prospect of advantage, his expectations were most awfully disappointed. Instead of acquiring large possessions, he was sent away utterly destitute, and was compelled, it seems, to leave his substance behind him. It will appear also, that he was severely chastised for his residence in Sodom, by the extreme distress he suffered in the different branches of his family, which, doubtless, were much corrupted through their connections in the place. His married daughters perished in the conflagration, and the two, who accompanied him, were far from being a comfort to him; and his wife, though rescued from the flames of the city, died in the confines of it by a most tremendous visitation: "She became a pillar of salt," and there remained, as a monument of the di-

* 2 Pet. ii. 9.

vine displeasure, because in her heart she turned back to Sodom.

Would to God, that Lot's example may deter every one, who professes godliness, from the love of the world! Let us beware: if we are under the influence of a covetous spirit, we are making bitter work for repentance, and shall, probably, have to read our sin even in our present punishment. It will be no wonder, if we miss the very object we are most eagerly pursuing; no wonder, if our families prove an inexpressible affliction to us: for, while we introduce them into temptations, they will soon learn to be unmindful of our exhortations, and be carried away with the error of the wicked.

And while we are considering what instructions may be derived from this history, we should attend to our Lord's admonition, "Remember Lot's wife.*" She was nearly allied to a good man, but a stranger to his holy principles. For awhile she was spared for his sake. But what availed it, that she was brought safely out of Sodom, since she was destroyed as effectually as if she had remained in it. What then was her offence? "She looked back," doubtless from an improper attachment to the things she had left behind. How loudly does this preach to us, to beware of "lusting after evil things!" "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, let us press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus †."

* Luke xvii. 32.

† Phil. iii. 13, 14.

After this most afflictive dispensation, Lot had further trials to endure. How much more distressing his situation, than when he sojourned with Abram ! He had indeed obtained mercy for Zoar, and fixed his abode there, but he soon removed his residence, terrified, as it should seem, by the wickedness of the place. He fled from the neighbourhood, which had been so signally marked by the vengeance of God ; and the last that we hear of him is, that he dwelt in a cave with his two daughters.

But here again, what cause for mourning on his account ! Shall we conceal the sequel of his history ? No ; God has openly declared it in his word, and, whatever abuses may be made of it by men of corrupt minds, it will become us to endeavour to reap much improvement from it. It is recorded, that, through the base suggestion and enticement of his daughters, he fell into the most horrid and unnatural sins ; for two nights together he was 'betrayed into drunkenness and incest.

If we do not know something of the depraved state of the human heart, this will appear truly astonishing. We offer no excuses, nor can we admit any palliations of his conduct ; but we are constrained to weep over him. With a mixture of distress and horror, and with a godly jealousy for ourselves, we cannot forbear crying out, Is this He, who had stood firm against all the temptations of Sodom, and there preserved the strictest chastity and sobriety ; now overcome in a cave ? Is this He, who was vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked ; now seduced into filthiness of the basest kind ?

kind? Who then is secure? Not even those, who for the longest season have vigorously resisted every allure-ment to sin, and who seem the most established in grace. Ah! “let him, that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall*!” If we maintain our steadfastness, we are upheld by the power of God; to whom alone we must ascribe all the excellence and perseverance of his people. Not to mention Lot, even St. Paul himself, in his most advanced state, was nothing, and he cried out, “Not I, but the grace of God, which was with me*.”

This also will teach us, that our security does not depend upon our outward situation. We might have thought, that Lot in a cave would have been much more safe than in Sodom; but it proved otherwise. Retirement, though on many accounts desirable and useful, will afford us no certain protection. If the Lord himself do not preserve us, the most favourable place may expose us to the most destructive snares; and, though all external enticements were removed, we should find enough, within, to overcome us.

What other expedient, then, is left us, but to be humbled under a sense of our extreme depravity? Instead of proudly censuring the conduct of Lot, which is allowed to be detestable, let us look into our own hearts, and we shall perceive abundant cause for the deepest abasement. But while we tremble for ourselves, under a conviction of our weakness, let us engage the power of God in our defence, by “taking hold of his

* 1 Cor. x. 12,

† xv. 10.

Covenant." Help is laid for us "upon One that is Mighty:" and, if we renounce all self-confidence and lean only upon Him, we may rejoice in the hope, that "his strength will be made perfect in our weakness."

MELCHISEDEC.

CHAP. VII.

Melchisedec met Abraham, and blessed him—prefigured Christ, as being both King and Priest—King of righteousness and peace—and as a Priest, instructing, sacrificing, interceding—represented also the unchangeable nature and ministry of Christ.

IN studying the holy scriptures, it will be our wisdom to attend, not to any nice or critical enquiries, but to plain, practical instructions; not to endeavour to explore what was designed to be kept secret, but to have a right understanding, and to feel the influence of those important truths, which are expressly declared. The man, who reads only to gratify a vain and conceited curiosity, will find enough in the Bible to perplex and confound him, and while he overlooks or despises those lessons, which alone can make him truly wise, he will be lost in endless researches after that which can never profit. A spirit of this kind, we fear, has caused some to throw away the word of God in disgust, because its accounts are so dark and unsatisfactory, and has excited others to write voluminous criticisms and commentaries upon it, while they have remained utterly ignorant of its one grand purpose, to teach us the way of righteousness and peace. Would we guard against these dangers? Let us not complain, that so little is

revealed to us, and that little in so imperfect a manner, but let us seek, with humble prayer, for “a right judgment in all things,” and, instead of aiming to unravel difficulties, let us desire, from every passage we read, to reap some spiritual advantage.

Such cautions, at all times necessary, are particularly suitable, while we turn our attention to the history of Melchisedec. The very concise description of this character, and the mysterious terms in which he is spoken of, have given rise to various fancies, conjectures, and unprofitable disputes. Avoiding these, then, “which minister questions, rather than godly edifying, which is in faith,” let us enquire what the scriptures have related concerning him, and what real benefit may thence be derived to us.

Years before
Christ 1913.

This illustrious man (for such he appears to be, even from the little which is told us) is introduced to our notice, only upon occasion of his interview with Abraham, and not the least mention is made of any other circumstance of his life. When that Patriarch returned from the conquest he had obtained over four confederate kings, among those, who went out to meet him with their congratulations, was the royal personage before us. The narration, as it stands in the old testament, is brief and simple, and involves not any considerable difficulties. “Melchisedec king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most

high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all *."

It should seem, then, from this short account, that Melchisedec was one of the kings of Canaan (Salem, the city of his government, probably being the same as Jerufalem †), preserved from the general idolatry and wickedness of the country, a pious and devout worshipper of the true God, who, to recommend the religion he professed, himself presided in its solemn rites and offices, as "the priest of the most high God." It is pleasing to observe even a very small remnant among such an accursed race, as the Canaanites were; and we have reason to hope, that God may have many faithful servants, where we may be ready to conclude there is no knowledge of Him at all. Elijah cried out, "I only am left," at the very time that there were seven thousand in Israel, who abhorred idols ‡. A consideration this, which should enlarge our charity, and encourage the delightful expectation, that there may be much more real piety, than what may have fallen under our notice, and more than we can sometimes imagine or believe.

It does not surprise us, that Melchisedec and Abram knew each other, and gave proofs of mutual affection, when we advert to the situation in which these good men were placed. Persons of unfeigned godliness, while they separate from those of an opposite description, are strongly attached to one another, and bound

* Gen. xiv. 18—20. † Psal. lxxvi. 2. ‡ 1 Kin. xix. 10—18.

by the most indissoluble ties. Their acquaintance will soon be formed, when once their religious sentiments are properly understood; and as their friendship is founded on pure and permanent principles, it will not fluctuate or disgust, like the connections which arise only from politeness, convenience, or interest. O "love the brotherhood!" Cultivate an intimacy with those who fear God, and improve your intercourse with them to the best purposes.

But Melchisedec appears, on this occasion, not only in his private capacity, as the friend and companion of Abram, but as sustaining and executing the venerable office of Priest. The bread and wine, which he brought forth, seem to have been more than an hospitable refreshment for the weary soldier; they were, probably, an oblation made to God, by which Abram was called to offer up his grateful praises for the victory he had obtained. And, while they solemnly joined in the divine worship, Melchisedec, according to the character he was then supporting, pronounced a benediction upon the Patriarch in the name of the most High God. Abram also regarded in him something more than the piety of the man, or the power of the prince; he confessed the Minister of religion, and revered the authority of God in the person of his servant: "He gave him tithes of all."

The duties of the priesthood, then, are not incompatible with the dignity even of a King. Yet they demand our reverence, not for the qualifications of him who performs them, but because the great God himself is the sole object of them. And is it not matter of grief

to every serious mind to observe them, as they now are, treated with contempt? For this surely is an evident sign of an awful declension in real godliness. In proportion as the knowledge and the fear of God prevail among us, those, who are called to the sacred function, will meet with attention and respect, not merely for their own sakes, but for His, whom they represent. We remember, who hath said, with a reference to all, who serve in the ministry of the Gospel; "He that heareth you, heareth me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth me*." Nor do we forget the exhortation of his Apostle, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you: and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake†."

This account concerning Melchisedec is plain and intelligible; but if we enquire, further than the history relates, from what ancestry he was descended, or whether he had any posterity, where or when he was born, or what the time and manner of his death, from whom he derived his office, or who succeeded him in it, we shall soon be embarrassed. It will appear, however, that the very silence of the scriptures is instructive, and that an important use should be made, as well of what is concealed, as of what is clearly declared. It must be owned, that, if the brief narration in Genesis had been all we had read of Melchisedec, we should not have brought forth his character as the subject of a separate chapter, because the principal cir-

* Luke x. 16. † 1 Thess. v. 12, 13.

cumstance was noted before, in the life of Abram. But he is introduced to us upon another and more exalted occasion, in a very remarkable prophecy delivered by the Psalmist concerning both the kingdom and the priesthood of the Redeemer, to whom the Father of all is represented as saying, with an oath, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec*."

Here we are carried beyond the ancient records of the old testament; an unexpected lustre breaks in upon us; and Jesus, the Son of God, stands revealed in all his glory before us. It would discover an ignorance and contempt of Him, not to pause and contemplate the great Antitype here exhibited in the person, the names, and the offices of Melchisedec, especially as we are taught to do it, in a large and express comment, by an inspired Apostle. Let the passage be carefully reviewed. "This Melchisedec" (who is introduced as a type of the Saviour), "king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham gave a tenth part all; first being by interpretation King of Righteousness, and after that also, King of Salem, which is King of peace; without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually †."

The propriety, therefore, of pointing out a likeness between Melchisedec and the Saviour will be readily allowed. And while we are following so safe a guide

* Psa. cx. 4. † Heb. vii. 1—3.

as one of the sacred writers, and not indulging the vain conceits of our own imagination, we need not fear any abuse of the subject, but may rejoice in it as replete with spiritual instruction and comfort. Herein we shall discover much of the grace and glory of Christ, who, though represented by Melchisedec, appears infinitely superior in worth and dignity. We shall be constrained to confess the divine perfections of his nature, and to admire the offices he sustains on our behalf, by which he is qualified to give relief and consolation to his people, just as their cases may require.

Upon a comparison, then, of Jesus with Melchisedec, we shall be led to consider,

I. The two great offices united in the person of the Saviour, who, like this remarkable type, is at the same time both King and Priest. When it is said, that as a priest he resembles Melchisedec, much more is implied, than that he has an unchangeable priesthood, far more excellent than that of Aaron, which was designed to continue but for a season: It is further intimated, that, while he executes the duties of this important ministry, he sustains also another character, and, like Melchisedec, exercises the authority of a Prince. These could not be joined together under the law of Moses: King Uzziah was smitten with leprosy for attempting it*. But the Redeemer, like the King of Salem, is invested with both, according to the prophecy concerning him, "He shall sit and rule upon his throne, and he shall be a priest upon his throne†."

* 2 Chron. xxvi. 16—21. † Zech. vi. 13.

An Apostle also declares, "He is a Prince and a Saviour *." For the sake of distinctness, we may consider them separately.

1. He is a King. He possesses an extensive dominion, not only as partaking of the divine nature, but in his mediatorial capacity. A kingdom of a particular kind, and for special purposes, is committed into his hands. "He is Head over all things to the Church †." All persons are under his control; all events are entirely at his disposal. This government is undertaken with a view to the perfect redemption of his people; and will then be resigned, when the end shall be accomplished. Those, who are brought under the influence of his grace, though, before, they had been most rebellious, are made his willing and obedient subjects. They acknowledge his sovereign right over them, submit to his precepts, yield themselves to his will, and should rejoice in the security, which the exercise of his unlimited power is designed to give them, Ah! how many deny or oppose his authority, and say, "We will not have this man to reign over us ‡!" The proud, the covetous, the revengeful, the sensual, and the profane, are all equally averse to obey the command of Jesus.—But do any enquire, What are the peculiar blessings of his government? or, What advantage shall we receive from an unfeigned submission to him? The excellency and happiness of his kingdom will appear, if we advert to the apostolical explanation of the type. The office, the name, the city of Melchisedec, are all observed to be figurative and signifi-

* Acts v. 31. † Eph. i. 22. ‡ Luke xix. 14.

cant descriptions of a more glorious Personage, who is, in the full import of the words, "King of Righteousness—and King of Peace."

Agreeable to this are the prophetical declarations concerning the Redeemer. "He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people."—"In his days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth*." "His name shall be called—The Prince of peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever†." "Behold, a King shall reign in righteousness,—And the work of righteousness shall be peace‡."—"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation:—and he shall speak peace unto the heathen§." The descriptions of the new testament are exactly similar. "The kingdom of God is—righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost||."

A more attentive consideration of these truths may confirm us in our attachment to the Saviour, and quicken us in his service. We remark, therefore, first,

He is "King of righteousness." He possesses the perfection of holiness, without the least pollution or defect in his nature; and, in the execution of his office,

* Psal. lxxii. 2, 3, 7. † Isa. ix. 6, 7. ‡ Isa. xxxii. 1, 17.

§ Zech. ix. 9, 10. || Rom. xiv. 17.

he acts consistently with himself, "judging his people righteously." The laws, which he has enacted, are "holy, just, and good;" and the administration of his government, in all its branches, is according to truth and equity.—Have we bowed to his sceptre? Do we cordially approve what he requires, and cheerfully acquiesce in what he appoints? What mean those pleas for sensual indulgence, those complaints of the strictness he enjoins, or those murmurings against his dispensations? What are all these, but so many base charges against Him, of tyranny, cruelty, or injustice? What are they, then, but unequivocal proofs of disaffection and rebellion?

Let those, who unfeignedly submit to him, rejoice, that he will give them those tempers of mind, which are indispensably necessary for them, and that he will enable them to perform the duties, which he commands. He is therefore "a King of righteousness," because the very end of his government is, that he may make all his subjects like himself. They are renewed after his image, and rendered conformable to his will. Much opposition, indeed, is raised against him from their depraved nature. But he reigns in them, that he may subdue their corruptions, and purify them to himself; so that finally, by the power of his Spirit, as well as through the merit of his blood, they shall be presented to himself, "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing."

Shall this be accounted a grievance? Is it not, rather, a most invaluable blessing? His service, in the
utmost

utmost strictness of it, will be found the most perfect freedom; and those are the happiest persons who, are most faithful in it. Where, then, are they, who, wearied with the drudgery of sin, are earnestly longing for deliverance? Let them behold this King of Sion; and, renouncing every other lord and master, "who have had dominion over them," let each of them say, "O Lord, come and set up thy throne within me, subdue my rebellious heart to thyself, make me to walk at liberty in the way of thy commandments, and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience, which thou hast enjoined!"

Is this what you cannot brook? Is it, in your view, unnecessary or unreasonable? Ah! bow no longer at the mention of his name; profess no more regard to his character; nor indulge the presumptuous hope, that you shall have any advantage from his undertaking. He rejects with abhorrence your pretences of esteem, and asks, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say*?"

He is also "King of peace." Sin has introduced confusion and misery amongst men, and as far as "the God of this world" bears rule within them, they are not only exposed to the fierce anger of the Lord God Almighty, but are also truly wretched in themselves. To rescue them from this state of wrath and woe, Jesus sets up his standard, and, while he requires them to acknowledge his authority, he promises to secure to them "the blessing of peace." Enemies, indeed,

* Luke vi. 46.

they will still have to oppose them, insomuch that they may expect to be engaged in one continued and severe conflict to the very hour of their death. But, notwithstanding this warfare, they enjoy the most inviolable safety, and, in general, possess a sweet serenity of mind, under the government of Jesus. This is his own assurance to them; "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace."

He undertakes to make reconciliation between God and man, to bring together those adverse parties, and to unite them in closest bonds of friendship and love. Thus "He is our peace," not only as he publishes to sinners pardon with their offended God, but as he procures it for them. By him, therefore, we have deliverance from condemnation, and access with confidence and joy to that God, who would otherwise have been "a consuming fire," but who is now become "a Father of mercies, and a God of all comfort." Let such as are trembling under the apprehensions of the divine wrath, be persuaded to commit their cause to Jesus, and he will "repair the breach" between God and their souls, appease the terrors of their guilty consciences, and "give them the knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins." They shall then be able to add their testimony to that of the primitive believers; "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ *."

His kingdom may also properly be said to be ordered in peace; inasmuch as his grace subdues the vio-

* Rom. v. i.

lence of those evil tempers and affections of the human heart, which occasion continual strife and confusion in the world, and from which "come wars and fightings." He reconciles men to each other as well as to God, making them "to be of one mind," and "to dwell together in unity." By the influence of his Spirit, those of fiercest dispositions are rendered meek and gentle, "forbearing one another, and forgiving one another." It is therefore described as the effect of his government, that "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them *."

To what, then, shall we ascribe the bitter contentions which prevail in the earth, but to an ignorance of Jesus, or to a proud opposition against his spiritual dominion? Notwithstanding all the fine compliments, which sinners are willing to pay him, they yet obstinately continue enslaved to the prince of darkness. For where there is no peace or love, there Jesus cannot reign; "where envying and strife is," there Satan maintains the sway. Did we truly desire the welfare of society, did we seek for real happiness in our own souls, we should pray that the Gospel of Christ "may have free course," and that both ourselves, and all around us, may come under its entire influence, and be subdued to "the obedience of faith."

The resemblance, which Melchisedec bears to the Saviour, will further appear, if we consider the other

* Isa. xi. 6.

important character which Jesus sustains; and therefore we observe,

2. He is a Priest. It is recorded of the king of Salem, that "he was the priest of the most high God;" and in this, more than in any other circumstance, he represented Him, who undertook to mediate between man and God. "Thou art a Priest," is the word of the oath, whereby the Son of God was constituted to his office: and a large portion of the epistle to the Hebrews is taken up, both in proving the priesthood of Christ, and in explaining the peculiar nature of it. It is for us, then, to enquire, what Jesus does for his people, how we are to regard him, or what benefits we may expect from him, in this character. A priest is one, who "is ordained for men to minister in things pertaining to God:" for which purpose, the following, among others, are to be noted as most essential parts of his employment; and all these we perceive to be fully executed by our Melchisedec.

1. He is a teacher of the ignorant, declares to them the mind of God, and instructs them in divine wisdom. "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts *." Thus Jesus was "anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek," and it becomes us to sit at his feet, and to seek information from Him in the important concerns of salvation. Let us study the word which he taught; let us pray to him for the light and guidance of his Spirit; and we have his promise, that we "shall not walk in dark-

* Mal. ii. 7.

nels."—This is not all: it is of greater consequence to observe,

2. He offers a sacrifice to God for us. It is described as an act peculiar to the priesthood, to present an expiatory oblation to God, without which no one can justly be said to execute the office. A prophet may teach, but a priest only can sacrifice. All those of Aaron's family, under the Jewish economy, then most especially prefigured the Saviour, while they were performing that part of the service, appropriated to them, the shedding of blood as an expiation; nor would Jesus have answered to the types, unless he had made a proper atonement for sin. "This is the account given us: "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer *." His death, therefore, is continually spoken of as the one grand propitiation, by which we have pardon and peace with God. "He hath given himself for us, an offering, and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour †." "He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; — and was once offered to bear the sins of many ‡."

Upon the Socinian scheme, a considerable portion of the new testament has little or no meaning; in particular, the whole of this similitude between Jesus and Melchisedec vanishes entirely. For how can He be "a priest after the order of Melchisedec," who is no priest at all, or, which is the same thing, who does no one act peculiar to that character? While they deny, therefore, that the blood of Christ is to be considered

* Heb. viii. 3. † Eph. v. 2. ‡ Heb. ix. 26, 28.

as an atonement for sin, they take from him the honour of his priesthood, and are obliged to put the most forced and unnatural constructions upon the plainest declarations. This also is a system, most comfortless indeed! For if no sacrifice has been made for us, what other conclusion can we draw, than that "we are yet in our sins?" It is a doctrine, then, which lies at the very foundation of our faith, that Jesus Christ is, in a proper sense, our High priest, constituted chiefly for the purpose of "making reconciliation for the sins of the people*;" and this he did, when he offered up himself once for all.

Do we not feel the need, and shall we not rejoice in the sufficiency, of this costly expiation? Do any, under a conviction of great demerit and liableness to extreme punishment, enquire, "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?" "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" Man is, in himself, without help, and without hope: but Jesus is "set forth as a propitiation, that God might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth†." The blood of the cross, then, is the only consideration, which a righteous God, asserting the honours of his government, will accept for the pardon of a returning sinner. This, however, is of such value, as to atone for offences the most numerous, and those of deepest dye. It will avail for transgressors of every description, age, and nation. It is "a propitiation—not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world‡."

* Heb. ii. 17.

† Rom. iii. 25, 26.

‡ 1 John ii. 2.

It has been already intimated, that it was probably in his priestly character, that "Melchisedec brought forth bread and wine," as an oblation to the Lord, a thankful acknowledgment for the victory obtained; nor can we, upon this subject, omit to mention, that an offering, exactly similar, is appointed by Jesus, as a standing ordinance in the Christian church. We partake of "the bread and wine, which the Lord hath commanded to be received;" and while we celebrate the Eucharist, like Abram we give thanks for the glorious conquest vouchsafed unto us, and "bless the most high God, who hath delivered our enemies into our hand."

If we further attend to the resemblance pointed out to us, we shall observe concerning "the High priest of our profession,"

3. He intercedes for and blesses his people. It was the invariable custom of those, who sustained this office under the Jewish economy, to offer up prayers for the congregation, and then to pronounce the solemn benediction upon them. We perceive also, that "Melchisedec blessed Abram." He not only with earnestness entreated God on behalf of the Patriarch, but, as with authority, declared the divine favour towards him. And do we not remark the excellency of our High priest? "He appears in the presence of God for us." He bears upon his heart before God the names of all his faithful servants, he makes mention of their particular cases and necessities,* and, as their Advocate, he pleads their cause. The prevalency of his intercession is grounded on the efficacy of his sacrifice;

so that he asks for them, only what he has merited by his death. What a strong confirmation of our faith should this be, what a lively hope should it inspire, when we approach the throne of grace! We have one who will present our petitions, and ensure success for them. We may, therefore, “come boldly, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*.”

Jesus, also, not only entreats the Father for all them who believe, but has power to bestow the richest benefits upon them. He blesses them, in the most extensive sense, as commanding them to be blessed, and making them so, by the communication of all spiritual favours. We behold Melchisedec standing, with great solemnity, to pronounce, in the name of the most High God, his benediction upon the Patriarch; and then he is suddenly withdrawn from our view. We read also, that Jesus, just before he was parted from his disciples, “led them out as far as to Bethany: and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven†.”—Has he, then, ceased to exercise the same tender concern for the security and happiness of his people? No: he continues to bless them even to this very day. Though his bodily presence be removed, his kindness is still afforded us.

“He has received gifts for men;” and these he is ever pouring down upon his Church.—O let us be anxious to share in his bounty; or else, what will all his

* Heb. iv. 16. † Luke xxiv. 50, 51.

merciful propofals and promifes avail us? While others obtain pardon, peace, and falvation by him, we may perifh in ignorance, or contempt of him. May God, “who has raifed up his fon Jefus, fend him to blefs us, in turning away every one of us from his iniquities * !”

Shall it not alfo be obferved, that “Abram gave to Melchifedec a tenth part of all?” But what acknowledgment of reverence, dependence, and gratitude, are we rendering to Jefus? To Him we owe our all: but what returns do we make? Is it not incumbent upon us to “honour Him with our fubftance, and with the firft-fruits of all our increafe?” We rejoice, that, while we bring the free-will offering of a thankful heart, he will graciously accept it; and what is prefented in faith and love, fhall be honoured at laft with an abundant reward.

Upon a further comparifon of Jefus with Melchifedec, we fhall perceive,

II. The proper Godhead of the Saviour, as well as his continuance in the work he has undertaken. He is unchangeable, having neither beginning nor end of his exiftence; He is “the fame, and his years fhall not fail; the fame, yefterday, to-day, and for ever †.” It may feem ftrange, indeed, that the fhort fpan of a mortal’s abode upon earth can, in any way, reprefent His duration, which is, ftrictly fpeaking, unlimited, “from everlafting to everlafting.” But it appears to be intended, when it is faid, that the typical perfon, we are confidering,

* Afts iii. 26.

† Heb. i. 12. xiii. 8.

“ without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually *.”

It is not to be hereby concluded, that Melchisedec was, like Adam, immediately created, or that he had no human extraction; but only, that his genealogy is not recorded, and that the sacred history has purposely concealed his ancestry. It were in vain to search for his original; and the very silence of the scripture, upon this point, is designed to raise our thoughts to Him, whose generation cannot be declared, — “ the everlasting Father ” — who “ was in the beginning ” — “ before all things ” — and “ whose goings forth have been from everlasting †.”

Here our proud reason must stoop. We pretend not to comprehend the attributes of the divine nature, or to explain the way, in which One of such exalted dignity could assume our flesh, be born, and live, and die upon the earth. The doctrine is, confessedly, mysterious; but the fact itself is clearly ascertained, being attested by many witnesses of unquestionable authority, in the strongest and most explicit manner. Surely it were the height of presumption to limit the perfections of “ the High and Lofty One,” by our scanty capacities. We will allow Him to possess, what we cannot fully understand, or by any language describe. Notwithstanding, therefore, the artful cavils of unstable men, who would rob us of our hope, we maintain, and

* Heb. vii. 3. † Isa. ix. 6. John i. 1. Col. i. 17. Mic. v. 2.

with awful reverence adore, the Godhead of the Saviour. Herein we perceive our security, since He, in whom we trust, is "mighty to save," and when we depend upon his power, we lean on that arm, which cannot be broken.

Nor are we to conclude, that Melchisedec never died, because it is said, that he has "no end of life, but abideth a priest continually." We can only collect from it, that it has pleased God to give us no account of his decease, or of the abolition of his office. We do not read, that he had any predecessor in it; nor is mention made of any one who succeeded him. In this respect, therefore, he stands as a typical resemblance of our great High priest, being "made like unto the Son of God." For of the priesthood of Jesus there can be no such change, as there was in that of Aaron's family. The Lord Christ, like Melchisedec, appears alone in that most excellent Ministry, to which He is appointed. He had none to go before him in it, nor will he have any to follow him. In the highest sense, "He abideth a priest continually;" for "he was consecrated for evermore," not as those of Aaron's order, "after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life*."

How comfortable a truth is this, that our Jesus is a constant Saviour, that he is still carrying on the grand purpose of his mediation, before the throne of his Father, and will not resign it, till the ends of it be perfectly accomplished! Let his people derive strong

* Heb. vii 16, 28.

consolation from the firm belief of his sufficiency to support them in all their distresses. For thus he speaks to them, "Because I live, ye shall live also *." And let sinners in all ages be encouraged to trust in Him, who "is able to save them to the uttermost, that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them †."

* John xiv. 19. † Heb. vii. 25.

I S A A C.

C H A P. VIII.

Isaac, the child of promise—derided by Ishmael—accompanied his father to mount Moriah—submitted to be bound—prefigured Christ—a man of meditation—married Rebekah—prayed for a child—partial to Esau—comforted by God in Philistia—equivocated concerning his wife—barassed by the Philistines, but blessed of God—in total blindness—deceived by Jacob, who obtained his benediction—saw the two brothers reconciled, and died 180 years old.

ON reviewing the records of past ages, we are struck with wonder, whilst we observe the Church of God at some times confined within so narrow limits, and possessed of so little power, that it appears ready to be crushed by the superior strength of its enemies, or to die away of itself, without leaving any succession. This was peculiarly the case at that period, when all the promises concerning the Saviour were limited, not only to one family, but even to one particular branch of it. The whole plan of Redemption seems, frequently, to have depended upon a single life, exposed to many and great dangers, in the view of which we almost tremble for the event. What, if that life had been prematurely cut off? What, if the Ark had sunk in the waters, as we might have apprehended, and Noah, together with
his

his household, had perished in the deluge? What, if Abraham had died childless; which, for a long time, appeared highly probable? Or, what, if Abraham's son had been really offered up, according to the divine injunction, or had been removed, in any other method, without issue? How, then, had the promise been fulfilled?

Ah! how foolish are such enquiries! How vain and dishonourable our fears! Do we forget, that "the Lord reigneth," that "He doeth all his will," and that "His counsel shall stand?" He cannot be unmindful of his own designs, nor can he want means to accomplish them. In all his dispensations, while he seeks his own glory, he watches over his Church, to defend it. He will plead its cause, and, whatever obstructions may lie in the way, he will bring into full effect that glorious Salvation, he has prepared for it.

This constant care of God's providence, towards his Church, is very observable, as from other parts of the sacred history, so especially from that which is now before us. In the preservation of the seed, from which it was predicted that the Saviour should spring, we cannot but perceive the hand of God, repeatedly and in a very signal manner, displayed. May we learn to admire, and praise, and trust the Lord God of Israel, "who only doeth wondrous things," and who stands engaged for the protection of his own people, even to the end of the world!

Abraham may die, but Isaac is raised up: and as God was with Abraham, so did he promise to be with Isaac. This favoured son himself must be removed;
but,

but, whatever dangers may threaten, his life is prolonged, till he has answered the purpose, for which he was appointed. He had received "the blessing" from his father, and he must consign that most valuable legacy to one particular child, whom the Lord would give him.—These are considerations, that demand our attention.

The character of Isaac does not appear conspicuous, for any great exploits which he performed, or for any very striking events which happened to him. He was not of the most active spirit, but fond of quietness and retirement. His dispositions were truly amiable; and, though his example is not faultless, he may be proposed as a pattern of righteousness, in the general tenor of his conduct. The holy scriptures furnish us with the most indubitable testimonies in his favour. The Lord God has been pleased to put a most distinguished honour upon him, by inserting his name into that title, which He claims to himself, declaring that He is the God of Isaac, as well as the God of Abraham, and that by this appellation He will be known unto all generations*. And, as Isaac filled up a place of great importance in the Church below, so does he in the Church above. His descendants are warned, that they shall see him in the kingdom of God, whilst many of themselves shall be eternally cast out†.

Years before
Christ 1897.

The former part of Isaac's history is so connected with that of Abraham, that we have necessarily been led to speak much already con-

* Exodus iii. 15. † Luke xiii. 28.

cerning him. But it may not be useless to repeat some things, which have been mentioned before. His birth was attended with extraordinary circumstances. It was the subject of various promises and prophecies; an event, most ardently desired by his parents, and yet purposely delayed by the divine providence, till they were both advanced in age, that their faith might be the more exercised, and that Isaac might more evidently appear to be the gift of God, in a miraculous way, and *THE CHILD OF PROMISE**. His name was determined by immediate direction from Heaven, before he was conceived; a significant name, expressive of the joy, which both his father and his mother would receive from him. How exactly does he represent, in these respects, the greater Son of Abraham, whose coming was foretold for four thousand years, and whose birth was supernatural, whose name also was appointed by revelation, and who, in a much more eminent manner than Isaac, was the cause of joy to the world!

We forbear to dwell upon the minute particulars of his childhood, his circumcision on the eighth day, his gradual increase in stature, and the festivity of the family upon occasion of his being weaned.—But we must not forget one event, distressing to Abraham, which involved in it many important consequences. Very
Years before
Christ, 1892. early in life, Isaac was the object of the profane contempt of Ishmael, who had been born to Abraham by Hagar the Egyptian servant. This gave rise to the jealousy and resentment of Sarah,

* Gen. xxi. 1, &c.

who insisted, that, in order to prevent any competition between the children about the father's substance, Hagar and her son should be dismissed from the house, and that the inheritance should descend to Isaac. Sarah's motive might be base, but the purpose of God was hereby effected. The temporal possession, as well as the spiritual promise, was entailed upon Isaac; and therefore it was the counsel of the Lord, no less than Sarah's desire, that "the son of the bondwoman should not be heir with the son of the freewoman."

It may be useful to advert to St. Paul's evangelical application and improvement of this little history: and thus, from the obscurity of the old testament, the lustre of the new Covenant will break in upon our view*.—Ishmael, "who was of the bondwoman, born after the flesh," and who early betrayed the vile disposition of a scorner, fitly represents the condition and character of unbelievers, who are in a captivity of the most awful kind, possessed of no other than carnal principles; and who, "trusting to themselves that they are righteous," do generally shew themselves proud and insolent contemnners of others. All such as are of this description, according to the Apostle, are "of mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage," and will finally be excluded from God's family.—But in Isaac we behold a pleasing resemblance of real Christians; and, in his peculiar circumstances and exalted privileges, we perceive to what they also are called. , Like the son of Abraham, they become children and heirs, not by their

* Gal. iv. 22—31.

natural birth, but as being born of God, by the powerful influence of the Holy Ghost. They are also exposed to the profane ridicule of those, who are yet in their sins. "For as then, he, that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." But the conclusion, in which believers may rejoice and triumph, is, that, "as Isaac was, they are the children of promise," and that all the blessings and immunities of the new Covenant are secured to them by the unchangeable counsel and inviolable oath of God. They belong to His household, from which they shall never be ejected; they enjoy a "glorious liberty," being "the children of the free-woman," and are entitled to "an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Where, then, are those, who answer to this character? O stand fast in your liberty; cheerfully submit to contempt and opposition; exult in your present advantages and future prospects; and walk worthy of your high connections, and of your most holy calling! But prepare for trials the most severe, which are designed to fit you for your everlasting possession; and learn from the example before us, that "the heirs of promise" are not only not exempt from trouble, but frequently exercised with the sharpest afflictions.

Years before
Christ, 1872. When Isaac had arrived at a state of manhood, he was required to give a signal proof of his entire devotedness to God. Abraham was commanded to offer up his beloved son in sacrifice*. This

* Gen. xxii. 1, &c.

remarkable transaction, as far as Abraham was concerned in it, we have already considered. But if now we turn our eyes to the pious youth, the victim marked out for the slaughter, his faith and obedience will also appear truly eminent, as well as those of his honoured parent.

Isaac was, at first, unacquainted with the divine mandate, that he must himself die upon the altar; for he went only as the attendant and companion of his father, to testify his filial submission to him, and join with him in the sacred rites of worship. At length he wondered, what all this preparation for making an oblation to the Lord could mean, when yet no animal was provided for the purpose. While, therefore, he was bearing the wood, he enquired, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" Still the strange design was concealed from him, till they came to the appointed place; and then it could no longer be kept secret. We say not, what were his emotions, when he was informed, that he himself was the destined sacrifice, to be consumed upon the altar before him. But is it not obvious, that, through the whole transaction, he appears as a striking example of patient resignation and cheerful obedience to God? For, does he at all decline, or complain of, the tremendous injunction? Does he fly from his father, who now avows himself the executioner, ready to slay his son? Does he exert his strength, as he might do, to overcome his aged parent? Does he express an unwillingness to die; or even solicit, that he may be spared? No: we perceive no struggle; we hear of no petition for deliverance. Convinced that the command is of God, he yields up

Vol. I. N himself,

himself, and devotes his life to HIM, who had a right to take it away, in what manner He pleased.

Isaac, therefore, submitted, as it should seem without resistance, to be bound, and to be laid on the altar; and exposed his body to the knife, which was lifted up to destroy him. He was, indeed, suddenly rescued, but in a way that he expected not; so that he was as much a Martyr, as if his blood had been shed.—Are we not hereby instructed, to acquiesce without reluctance in the divine appointment, though it should be most contrary to our own desires or temporal advantage? While we remark, that Isaac freely surrendered up himself without a murmur, are we not ashamed of our own unwillingness to give up what is dear to us, whenever God requires it? Do His dispensations clash with our favourite schemes, or supposed interests? Then what discontent, and peevishness of spirit do we betray! Though we have repeatedly said to him, upon our bended knees, “Thy will be done,” we are fretful and angry, whenever our own wishes are not gratified.

Do we complain of the severity of God’s commands? Let us consider Isaac’s case, and not dare to open our mouths. How frequent is the excuse, when any important duty is inculcated, “I would do it,—but I must then forego this or the other enjoyment, and expose myself to dangers and distresses.”—And on this account do you hesitate to comply with an express precept? If difficulties will cancel your obligation to obedience, the whole of the divine law is at once annulled: for who will not think himself at liberty to of-

fer the like plea? If you acknowledge the authority of God at all, every thing must be sacrificed to it. Like Isaac, and like another eminent example, you must be “ready, not to be bound only, but also to die*,” in whatever way you may be called to it. It is not probable, that you will be tried, as this Patriarch was, but you must possess the same principle, and desire only, that “Christ may be magnified in your body, whether it be by life or by death.”

While we are contemplating the remarkable history before us, our thoughts are directed to a more exalted personage, whom Isaac prefigured, and to a more astonishing transaction, represented by that on mount Moriah. We behold Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham, in whom the Covenant is established, and in whom alone all the families of the earth can be truly blessed. Without dwelling on less interesting points of resemblance, in which Isaac typified the Saviour, we fix our attention on this circumstance, that he was required to give up his life, as an offering to God. We are carried out, then, in our meditations, to mount Calvary, not far distant from the spot, where Isaac was bound and laid upon the altar. We perceive Jesus, in his deepest humiliation, cheerfully acquiescing in his Father's appointment, and saying, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” We observe him under the influence, not only of a supreme regard to the command of God, but of tenderest love to perishing sinners, pressing on his way to Jerusalem, as if in haste to suffer †, and longing to be baptized with blood ‡.

* Acts xxi. 13. † Mark x. 32. ‡ Luke xii. 50.

Isaac, we have seen, conveyed the wood, that was designed to consume him: fit emblem of Jesus, who was constrained to bear the very cross, on which he expired! The readiness of Isaac to yield up himself a sacrifice, exhibits a lively image of the Saviour, who fled not from danger, but went forth to meet his enemies, surrendered himself into their hands, and submitted to be bound, insulted, scourged, and crucified by those, whom he might have confounded or destroyed in a moment. The blasphemous objection was urged against him, "He saved others, himself he cannot save:" but we admire his unparalleled condescension and grace, who, in order to save others, refused to save himself, when it would have been easy for him to have effected it. Vain, in themselves, would have been all the attempts of Jews and Romans, Priests, Judges, and Soldiers, to detain him as a prisoner, or to put him to death in any way. He could have commanded the assistance of "more than twelve legions of Angels*," or, even by a word or a look, struck terror and confusion into his strongest adversaries, as he did into some of those who went to apprehend him. Or again, he might have continued his existence, amidst all the agonies of crucifixion, and in spite of all the tortures they could have inflicted on him. For "No man (said he) taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again †." Yet "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth ‡."

* Matt. xxvi. 53. † John x. 18. ‡ Isa. liii. 7.

Nor will he ever repent of all that he has done or endured; but "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied *."

This is a subject, which calls for something more than the exercise of the tenderest feelings. It were easy to declaim on the sufferings of Jesus, so as to excite many tears. But he wants not our compassion. Our warmest gratitude, our most fervent love he demands; and who, that understands any thing of the cross of Christ, can withhold from him, what is so justly due? We cannot forget, that it was for our sake he most cheerfully submitted to drink of the bitter cup, and that he died, not to gratify the Jews, but to make his soul an offering for our sins. It becomes us, then, to weep, if not for Him, yet for ourselves, with profound humiliation on account of our own conduct, which has rendered such a sacrifice expedient. But while we perceive, that "He was wounded for our transgressions," we will rejoice in his Salvation, and resolve to devote our ALL to Him, who "laid down his life for us."

Years before
Christ, 1857. In pursuing the history of Isaac, we shall find him, in the very time of his greatest activity and vigour, a man of retirement and a remarkable calmness of spirit. We are pleased to discover some evident signs of dutiful affection to his parents, as well as of piety towards God. He appears to have been a kind and tender observer of his mother Sarah; and even when he had attained the age of forty years, he was not above feeling much distress for her

* Isa. liii. 11.

lofs. To his father he seems to have left the important concern of choosing his companion, and most readily to have acquiesced in the prudent and religious desire of Abraham, to procure a wife for him, not among the idolatrous Canaanites, but among his own kindred, who were then, probably, brought to the knowledge of the true God*.—Is not this an useful admonition to young men, that they be not “heady and high-minded,” overbearing and insolent towards their parents, to whom they owe all their support? Is it reasonable, is it grateful, to go contrary to their wise and pious directions, or not to consult their wishes, in a matter, on which so much of the welfare and happiness of the family may depend?

We pass by the minute account, which is given us, of the way in which Rebekah was sought and obtained for Isaac, observing only the manner in which he was engaged, when she was first conducted to him. “He went out to meditate in the field, at the even-tide;” and, it is probable, this was his usual practice.—Do we not all confess, that, in order to preserve the power, or enjoy the comforts, of religion, we must be in the habits of retirement, meditation, and prayer? Let Isaac, then, be proposed as an example. Perhaps the season here mentioned is particularly suitable for these purposes: “at even-tide,” in general, the mind will be best disposed for serious and devout reflections. But though the advantage and propriety of the duty be acknowledged, how few set themselves in earnest to the performance of it, or persevere in it with vigour!

* Gen. xxiv. 1, &c.

And to this neglect may we not ascribe the levity and unsteadiness, the ignorance and gloominess of some, who would be thought to pay attention to their spiritual concerns? Others, we perceive, studiously avoid solitude and holy contemplation, and endeavour to be in a continual round of dissipated company, in which every good impression may be effaced, and every pious resolution totally forgotten. What can we expect from characters of this kind? We do not wonder, that the most solemn warnings are lost upon them, and that they trifle with their most important interests, whilst their minds are in a perpetual fluctuation.

Years before
Christ, 1822.

In a few years afterwards, he, who had mourned for his mother, was called to weep over his father's grave. And in that last act of filial duty, we rejoice to observe the two rival brothers united. Isaac and Ishmael met together for the burial of Abraham*. On such an occasion, surely, if not before, the quarrels, which may have been excited in a family, should be laid aside, and all jealousies and contentions cease.

“After the death of Abraham, God blessed his son Isaac;”—blessed him, even as he had done Abraham, not only with a large increase of worldly substance, but also with abundant communications of grace, and with promises and revelations of love and mercy. Isaac, indeed, continued a stranger and a pilgrim in the land of Canaan, dwelling in tents; and in such a state he could not but be exposed to peculiar trials and distresses.

* Gen. xxv. 9, &c.

But “by faith he sojourned there,” and the Lord God of his father was with him.

Years before Christ, 1838. He had been encouraged to expect a numerous issue; but nearly twenty years elapsed, and there appeared no prospect of a child. This was designed to prove his faith and patience, and, probably, was extremely painful. It must have been a source of afflicting doubts and fears, not on his own account alone, but on that of others. For had he been cut off without any offspring, the promise would have failed, the Covenant itself had been broken. “Isaac, therefore, entreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren;” and, at length, to add the greater value to the gift, it was bestowed in answer to much prayer. “The Lord was entreated of him.”—It will be well, if in all our difficulties, we take the same method for obtaining relief. This, and this alone, is safe, is sure: all others may cover us with confusion.

Two children were born to him at one time, concerning whom the divine purpose was declared to the mother (and therefore we conclude, it was made known also to Isaac), that “the elder should serve the younger.” But here we are compelled to remark and lament the weakness and folly of a fond parent. A partiality appeared towards the elder son Esau, and for a reason too, which we might have wished to conceal, as being reproachful to this amiable character. “Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison.” Ah! how often has some such low and carnal motive operated even with good men, and betrayed them into an improper conduct! What need we have to watch every

every avenue of our senses, lest any temptation, unperceived, find admission and overcome us !

The preference given to Esau produced many very calamitous events, and, probably, laid the foundation for continual strife and hatred between the two brothers. What might increase the dissension was, that Rebekah also had her favourite, and “loved Jacob,” so as to discover some neglect of Esau.—Does not this history, then, admonish parents, to beware of forming an undue attachment to any branch of their family? Perhaps they may not be able to divide their affections with exact equality; but they should endeavour, at least, to refrain from a partial distribution of the outward marks of their favour, if they desire that their children should either be happy with each other, or bring any comfort to them.

Years before
Christ, 1804.

Isaac was a man of trouble, though under the immediate care of Heaven. In order to preserve life, it became necessary for him to remove from Canaan, which was visited with a grievous famine; and, by the divine direction, he took up his abode among the Philistines*. Do we wonder, that He, “to whom the promises were made,” should be reduced to difficulties in procuring sustenance for the body? Is not this a common case? Are not many of those, who are dearest to God, poor and afflicted, and some, perhaps, in fear of perishing by hunger? An infallible assurance, indeed, is given them, that “they shall not want any manner of thing that is good.” But their faith may be sorely tried; and, for that very

* Gen. xxvi. 1, &c.

end, they may be brought to such extremities, as to prove that they are willing to suffer, and resign their All to God. May we be emboldened to cast our care upon God, from the instance before us!

Isaac was compelled to sojourn amongst a strange people. But, in the country of Philistia, the presence and blessing of God were manifestly with him. The Lord himself appeared to him, to encourage his hope of protection and support from Heaven, and to confirm the Covenant with him, as he had done with Abraham, whereby the Patriarch was taught to expect the possession of the promised land, a numerous progeny, and one Seed in particular, “in whom all nations should be blessed.”—Are we not ready to say, If this God be our God, what have we to fear? If He will be with us to bless us, we need not dread, either a famine or the opposition of Philistines.

But did not Isaac's faith stagger? Alas! where shall we find an example of one, who has discovered no marks of unbelief? We perceive some grievous signs of human depravity, even in this eminent saint: and, what is remarkable, he fell into the very same sin, which brought so foul a stain upon his father Abraham's reputation. He was guilty of a mean and base equivocation concerning his wife, representing her as his sister; and into that poor subterfuge he was betrayed by a very dishonourable suspicion of the Philistines, and a cowardly apprehension of losing his life: “Lest (said he) they should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.” In this conduct we might point out many things wrong, and inconsistent with his general character.

character. The solemn declaration of God, that He would be with him and bless him, should have inspired him with greater courage, and preserved him in a more steadfast and entire dependence. But alas! both precepts and promises, of themselves, are ineffectual to restrain the corruptions of the heart. It pleases God to leave his people, at times, to a very painful experience of their own sinfulness, to teach them the continual need they have of his pardoning and sanctifying grace. May we ever remember, where our security is!

It must have been an humbling circumstance to Isaac, to be reproved, for his ungenerous suspicions and mean prevarications, by an heathen prince. And may we not say to all those, who profess godliness, O beware, lest your ignorant and even profane neighbours should have a similar occasion to reprehend you? They cannot enter into your sentiments and principles; but they can understand clearly what your tempers and practice ought to be, and they will be forward enough to reproach you for the inconsistency of your conduct.

Isaac had fallen; yet the favour of God was not withdrawn from him. During his residence in Philistia, he was blessed with a rapid and astonishing increase of wealth. "The man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great. For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants." Do we not perceive, that "the Lord maketh rich?" "The earth is His, and the fulness thereof." Be content, then, to leave the care and the disposal of your affairs to Him. If riches be expedient for you, it will be no difficult matter for him

to

to bestow them upon you, to the utmost extent of your wishes. But if you have a larger share of worldly prosperity, your anxieties and distresses will, probably, be augmented in proportion. The growing affluence of Isaac soon excited the attention and the jealousy of the Philistines. They regarded him with an envious eye, and, in order to drive him from their country, they endeavoured to render his situation as inconvenient and as unpleasant as they could, by stopping up his wells of water. To one of so peaceful and gentle a disposition, their contentious spirit must have been extremely painful. But, though wearied with the injurious treatment of men, and harassed by them from place to place, he was comforted by the gracious promises of God, who appeared to him at Beer-sheba, encouraged him to dismiss his fears, and gave him the repeated assurance of His presence and blessing. To commemorate the divine condescension, and erect a monument of his gratitude, as well as to perform an act of public worship, and openly declare his sentiments of religion, the pious Patriarch "builted an altar, and called on the name of the Lord," in that spot, where he had been so highly favoured. There also the Lord put an honour upon him, "in the sight of the nations," and constrained the very Philistines, who had thrust him from them, to solicit his alliance. The King, attended by his friend and the chief captain of his army, came to him, and confessed, that the Lord was with him of a truth. Nor did Isaac retain any sentiments of anger or revenge against them, for the cruelty and injustice with which he had been treated, but courteously received his

noble visitants, and entered into a solemn league with them.

Let those, who fear God, commit their cause into his hands. In such a world as this, it will be no wonder if they meet with some severe trials from the perverse tempers of unreasonable and ungodly men. The pride, covetousness, or envy of such persons will stir up strife; and the meek-spirited will be the objects of their resentment and oppression. Shall we not say to them, who are thus exposed to the scoffs or rage of persecutors, as our Lord to his disciples, "In your patience possess ye your souls *?" Be afraid of discovering the same disposition as your opposers; but, like Isaac, rather recede from, than strenuously insist on, even your just claims. Whatever contempt or injury you may suffer from sinners, the Lord is on your side: his comforts shall refresh you: and while you "abide patiently upon Him," He will restrain the fury of your enemies, and make you respectable before them. This he did for Isaac. Only be you careful to tread in the steps of the Patriarch; be not ashamed of your religion; let it be known, whom you serve: set up an altar to the God of heaven; and not only worship there yourselves, but call upon others also to join in your devotions.

Isaac had troubles of another sort, which we hasten to consider; some in his own person, and some in his family. A space of forty years, in the latter part of his life, is passed over, during which no remarkable event is recorded; and for more than that period, he

* Luke xxi. 19.

was afflicted with total blindness. In such a state, cut off from many of the comforts of society, he not only stood in need of continual assistance from others, but was liable to be imposed on by any deceits, they might wish to put upon him. It is mortifying to the pride of our nature, to be reduced to so helpless a situation, as to be almost entirely at the will of an unfaithful attendant, or an insidious Relation. Yet such was the case of this eminent servant of God.

We mentioned his domestic troubles. It will be recollected, that Isaac had a favourite son, who proved, as most favourite children do, the cause of much sorrow. Esau discovered a profane disposition in selling his birth-right; and, even in riper years, had given clear marks of an irreligious mind, in forming connections by marriage with the idolatrous Canaanites. This circumstance had been most distressing to the pious father, who yet, with all the folly which arises from a blind partiality, not only continued attached to his son, but forgetful, as it should seem, of the divine declaration, desired to give him the precedency in the family, to establish him in all the privileges of the first born, and to leave with him the peculiar blessing of the Covenant, which he himself had received from Abraham.

Years before
Christ, 1760.

When therefore it appeared from his age and many infirmities, that Isaac might not long survive, with an intention, not merely to settle his temporal affairs, but to commend his beloved child to the favour of God, he called for Esau, and expressed his wishes to bless him, before his death *. We for-

* Gen. xxvii. 1, &c.

bear to dwell upon the repast, which Isaac directed Esau to provide, "the savoury meat which he loved," and the very dishonest method, by which Rebekah imposed upon her husband, and the repeated falsehoods, with which Jacob endeavoured to conceal the fraud. The account of the transaction, which is related with inimitable simplicity, must very forcibly strike the passions of every reader. But suffice it, in this place, to observe, that, while all the different parties followed their own devices, the purpose of God was nevertheless fulfilled; and the benediction, containing the peculiar promises of the Covenant, was pronounced upon Jacob, much against the father's design. When Esau came to claim the blessing, the cheat was discovered; but the word could not be revoked. Nay probably, Isaac, immediately perceiving the hand of God overruling this event, was not more distressed by the treachery of Jacob, than by his own folly, in having attempted to frustrate the counsel of God, "that the elder should serve the younger." "He trembled very exceedingly;" but, notwithstanding Esau's pressing solicitations, and his own paternal fondness for him, he was constrained to confirm the sentence, and leave the birth-right with his younger son.

The story is most instructive, as well as affecting. We cannot fail to remark, that parents are generally punished for their partiality to their offspring. What else can be expected but continual jealousies and strife in their families, where one is undeservedly preferred before another? Their plans of settling their favourite child, in this or the other way, will probably be defeated,

feated, and they will read their sin in their own utter disappointment and confusion. But, though "there are many devices in a man's heart, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand *." Let us not foolishly endeavour to establish our own schemes, without seeking direction from Him. And, whatever be his purpose, let us bow before him, with perfect acquiescence in his disposal both of ourselves and our households, desiring that we may know and do his will.

It became necessary to separate the two brothers, in order to prevent the murderous designs of Esau, who avowed that he waited only for his father's death, to destroy Jacob. Isaac, therefore, sent away his son, who was now declared to be "the heir of promise," with a solemn charge to take a wife, not of the daughters of Canaan, but of his mother's kindred, and, with most earnest and devout supplications for him, he confirmed the benediction, he had before unwittingly given him †. In the midst of Isaac's weakness, then, we perceive the exercise of a strong faith. He had no doubt of the security of the Covenant, yet though firmly persuaded of the truth of all the promises, he was misled by an ill directed affection. We allow the validity of that testimony; "By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come ‡."

We have only to add, that his life, now rendered uncomfortable by bodily infirmities and domestic broils, was still protracted to a considerable length. He lived till Jacob returned from Mesopotamia, with a nume-

* Prov. xix. 21. † Gen. xxviii. 1, &c. ‡ Heb. xi. 20:

rous family and in great prosperity. It should seem also, that he witnessed a reconciliation between his two sons, and then died at the advanced age of one hundred and eighty years *. Thus the days of his pilgrimage were ended, and he was called to take possession of the heavenly Canaan, where all the chosen seed will shortly meet. Be it our concern to follow him, and to rejoice, amidst all our painful trials upon earth, in the hope of coming “to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are enrolled in heaven.”

* Gen. xxxv. 27—29.

J A C O B.

C H A P. IX.

S E C T. I.

Jacob, chosen of God—his mother's favourite—purchased Esau's birthright—obtained his father's benediction—fled from Esau—his vision at Bethel—came to Laban—married Leah, then Rachel—increased in substance—fled from Laban.

THE records of sacred history, which we are now examining, do not furnish us with accounts of powerful and extensive empires, or describe the achievements of mighty conquerors, in the bloody victories which they obtained, and the desolations which they spread from kingdom to kingdom. We are not conducted to such scenes of grandeur and gaiety, as the world generally admire. We are called, not into kings' palaces, but into the shepherd's tent. Yet hereby we are instructed in events of the greatest importance to mankind. We behold the means, by which God vouchsafed to communicate and preserve the knowledge of himself in the earth. We accompany, through its various trials and removals, the little society of his Church, dearer to him than the most exalted Monarchs, or the wisest Philosophers. We perceive the counsels of mercy towards our fallen race gradually unfolded;

and

and our eyes are gladdened with the glorious light of the Sun of righteousness, breaking forth out of the midst of darkness, to illuminate this poor benighted globe, and “shining more and more unto a perfect day.”

God was pleased to make choice of one family, in which he deposited the sacred treasury of his truth: and herein we observe Three, of more distinguished rank than the rest, whose names the High and Lofty One condescended to enrol with his own, and to insert in that Title, which He assumed to himself, as being expressive of his grace and faithfulness to all generations,—“The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.” Two of these we have already considered; and the third is now to come under our review.

Jacob was a stranger and a sojourner as his fathers were; and therefore, from his situation in life, and his unadorned manners, he may not be likely to attract the notice of the present age, which boasts of its politeness and refinement. But he will appear to be a character of real eminence, if we attend to the marks of genuine piety which he discovered, and to the honour which God put upon him. He was, in a peculiar sense, the root of the Jewish nation, inasmuch as from the several branches of his family sprang the twelve tribes. He was an illustrious progenitor of the Messiah, whom he prefigured, and who is also sometimes spoken of under his name. From him too, all the holy seed, and the children of God in every generation, are called—“The seed of Jacob,”—“The Israel of God.”

This history will exhibit some striking proofs of a divine Providence; the controlling influence of which, in its various designs and operations, will be most evidently perceived throughout the life of Jacob. May we remember, that we are under the same governance, at the entire disposal of the same Almighty Sovereign! Suffice it for us, though our pilgrimage should be, like his, most afflictive, that "The mighty God of Jacob" is engaged to help us.

In our reflections upon this character, we propose to accompany the Patriarch through the different situations, in which he was placed,—in his father's family,—in Mesopotamia,—upon his return to Canaan,—and in the land of Egypt. We consider him first, then, in his father's family.

Years before Christ, 1838. The sacred records begin their account of Jacob, even previously to his birth. He was given in answer to much prayer, that in him the holy seed might be continued, and the Covenant established. Esau, indeed, seemed to have, at least, an equal claim to the blessing, as a child of the same parent; or rather, as being the elder, he might have pleaded, that, by the right of primogeniture, he ought to have a preference to Jacob. But while they were yet in their mother's womb, the divine counsel was made known to her, that the two sons, she should bring forth, were designed to be the heads of two mighty nations, who would differ in their manners and struggle for the superiority; and yet, that, contrary to the general mode of dispensing the possessions of a family,

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the dominion should go to the younger, and the inheritance be entailed upon him*.

This circumstance, which might have appeared trifling in our view, is repeatedly introduced in the scriptures, and some important instructions are drawn from it. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world†;" nor does he merely foresee, but fore-ordain, determining to men the bounds of their habitation‡, and distributing his favours, temporal and spiritual, not as we might conjecture or prescribe, but "after the counsel of his own will§." As far as the prophecy related to the children themselves, the sequel of their history will, shew the completion of it; and as far as it concerned their respective posterities, it had its accomplishment in the reduction of the Edomites under the power of the Jews. The whole nation, then, which descended from Jacob, were a chosen people, the elect of God, according to this ancient prediction: and Malachi reminds them of their obligations, in that they were appointed to peculiar privileges, by the sovereign will and rich mercy of God alone||. But St. Paul extends the subject, and makes application of it, to illustrate the free and undeserved election of believers to the inestimable blessings of the Gospel¶. According to this doctrine, in every case, as well as in that before us, if any are favoured in preference to others, it must be ascribed, not to human merit, but to the wise and holy determination of

* Gen. xxv. 21—23. † Acts xv. 18. ‡ xvii. 26.

§ Eph. i. 11. || Mal. i. 2, 3. ¶ Rom. ix. 10—13.

the supreme Lord of all, who is not accountable to us for "any of his matters," and who declares, "I will shew mercy, on whom I will shew mercy*." No distinctions of birth or education, no outward professions, no boasted righteousness of our own, will entitle us to the regard of a holy God, or secure to us the salvation of Jesus. Many are partakers of this grace, who seem, like Jacob, inferior in several respects to some who "come short of it:" and all, who are saved, must acknowledge, with warmest affections of love and gratitude to God, "He hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began †."

A subject this is, of all others, the most humbling to man, and therefore the most likely to excite the strongest opposition. We do not undertake a defence of the divine procedure, which is far above all our comments. It remains to be justified in some future day, when all will be compelled to own, "Righteous art thou, O Lord; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!" In the mean time, let our proud reasonings be restrained. Whatever objections we may bring, one question is enough to silence all, "Nay but, O man, who art thou, that repliest against God ‡?"

The two children of Isaac soon discovered very different dispositions, according to the previous intimation given concerning them. Esau was bold, active, and enterprising; Jacob meek, and sedate, more suited

* Exod. xxxiii. 19.

† 2 Tim. i. 9.

‡ Rom. ix. 20.

to domestic employments. "Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man dwelling in tents*." It has been already remarked, that the younger son was the mother's favourite, not merely as being more at home and observant of her, but, we apprehend, because of the precedence, which God had designed for him. And to her full confidence of this, we are willing to impute her succeeding conduct, though most blameable. It is also probable, that she acquainted her beloved child with the purposes of God in his behalf, and that he was influenced by an expectation of the divine promise, in that behaviour towards Esau, which now comes under our consideration.

Years before
Christ, 1805.

When they were advanced to a state of manhood, Jacob fixed his eye upon the birthright, which Esau, as he made light of it, was easily persuaded to renounce. An opportunity offered for accomplishing Jacob's desire. Esau, wearied with hunting, and enfeebled with hunger, coveted his brother's pottage, and, through impatience for the gratification of his appetite, consented to give up the privileges, to which he was entitled as the first born. On this account he is condemned as "a profane person," and we are admonished from his example to beware, lest we also despise and barter away, for some sensual indulgence, the peculiar blessings which we enjoy under the Gospel†.—But what opinion shall we form of Jacob's conduct? The object, he had in view, was indeed most excellent; yet he is not thereby justified

* Gen. xxv. 27.

† Heb. xii. 16, 17.

in using any unfair method to obtain it. The divine counsel had intended it for him; but it became him to wait, in God's way, for the completion of his wishes. We cannot reconcile it with brotherly love, and true disinterested affection, that he should take advantage of Esau's necessity, to prevail upon him to make a concession so prejudicial to himself*. But, whatever Jacob was, we know that we ought to possess that charity, "which seeketh not her own," and to "look every man also on the things of others."

Years before
Christ, 1760.

From that time a considerable space elapsed, of which there are no memorials left in Jacob's history. He was still in his father's family; and probably, satisfied with the ease and quiet of domestic life, he might not experience any changes or events of great importance. But we are now hastening to one transaction of peculiar moment, which gave rise to the principal occurrences, which he afterwards met with.

When Isaac proposed to bequeath the blessing to Esau, Rebekah suggested a plan to Jacob, by which he might impose himself, for his elder brother, upon his aged parent, and thus by a fallacy obtain the bene-

* The first-born was not only entitled to a larger share of power, and a double portion of his father's goods, but, what is especially to be noted, he was the priest of the family, and presided in the offices of religion. In the case before us, it seems also to have been understood, that "The blessing of Abraham," respecting the promised Saviour, would go in the same line with the birth-right. We do not wonder, then, that, on this account, one of a pious disposition should set a high value upon it, and that He is marked as a profane person, who despised it.

diction,

dition *. Jacob, though deterred by the fear of detection, was instigated to it by his mother ; and after he had once embarked in the scheme, we wonder not, that he persevered in it through the most detestable falsehoods. We are, indeed, struck with horror to hear one lie added to another, and the sacred name of God introduced, as it were, to sanctify the cheat. But we are aware of the deceitfulness of sin ; and we apprehend, that, in general, sinners go far greater lengths, than they intended at first, or thought themselves capable of going. It was not enough for him to practise the fraud of appearing in his brother's raiment, nor even to violate the truth in the most direct terms, saying, " I am Esau, thy first-born ; — I have done according as thou badest me : " but, when questioned as to the quickness with which he had obtained the venison, he presumptuously and profanely, yet with an air of sanctity, replied, " The Lord thy God brought it to me. " And again, when interrogated more closely by the suspecting father, " Art thou my very son Esau ? " he said, " I am. "

We attempt not a justification of such insidious conduct as this. Let it meet with the abhorrence it deserves ; and let others beware of acting the same treacherous part. We are willing to give Jacob the credit of some good wishes and pious intentions. He aimed at that, which was in itself desirable and valuable, in a religious view. But we abominate the ungenerous and very dishonest means by which he effected his purpose. Let not the principle, of " doing evil that good may

* Gen. xxvii. 1, &c.

come," be adopted, in any circumstances whatever, by those who profess real godliness. Nor let those, who are afraid of being betrayed into gross enormities, allow themselves to deviate one step from the paths of rectitude. If we transgress at all, we shall be tempted to hide our fault, by having recourse to falsehood: and one lie, we have seen, prepares the way for another. A second and a third must be told to conceal the first. Who can say, where we shall be able to stop?

We freely censure the son, but we conceive the mother to be more blameable. She planned the scheme, and was the main actress, in it. She proposed the cheat, and encouraged Jacob to adopt it. The case is most awful; and yet, we fear, it frequently occurs. Parents are, every where, training up their children in the practice of fraud and hypocrisy, as in the present instance, for the sake of advantage. Is not this, indeed, the grand design of polite education, to initiate young persons in the arts of dissimulation, in order, as it is said, that they may make their way in the world?

Possibly both Rebekah and Jacob might have a regard to the intimation, which had been given from Heaven concerning the precedence of the younger son. But is it for us to hasten, or by our foolish contrivances to bring into effect, the divine counsel? Our impatient desires to accomplish the purposes of God arise from unbelief, and, though they may be suffered to succeed, tend rather to embarrass than relieve us. No promise in the Bible will ever justify us in any the smallest deviation from what is right. Let us leave to
God

God the management of his own concerns, and submit to him the time, as well as the way, of executing his designs. True faith will teach us to wait patiently upon Him; for “he, that believeth, shall not make haste.”

Yet we are constrained, upon this subject, to admire the over-ruling providence of God, who can order the stubborn wills of men, and even employ their sinful passions, to promote the ends of his government, without any impeachment of his own holy character. How astonishing is that influence, which he exercises upon the minds of free agents! They fulfil their own choice, and are accountable to him for their conduct; and, at the same time, he so disposes their hearts, as to determine all events, and “to do all his pleasure.” Such is the reflection of the pious Bishop Hall: “God does frequently accomplish his righteous will by our weaknesses; yet neither thereby justifying our infirmities, nor blemishing his own actions.”

The blessing was obtained by Jacob, who appeared in the habit of his elder brother. Isaac was permitted to be imposed on, and disappointed in his expectation, that the purpose of God might stand. Yet, though deceived as to the object, mistaking one son for another, he spake the language of inspiration, and his tongue was directed by an unerring wisdom, while he pronounced, that the divine benediction should accompany the person before him. Whatever temporal favours might hereby be intended for Jacob and his posterity, as wealth, honour, and sovereign authority; the peculiar privileges of the Covenant were certainly meant

meant to be entailed upon him, and it was implied in the sentence, that the Messiah, “He that shall have dominion*,” would come out of his loins, and the Church of God descend from him.

This high distinction would have been conferred upon him, in a way more reputable to himself, had he been content to have waited for it. Though he attained the object of his wishes, the sequel will shew how he was punished for his deceit. Very soon afterwards, he had occasion to tremble for his safety. Esau became his enemy, and avowed his intentions of murder. Jacob was, therefore, banished from his father’s house, in order to preserve his life; and, as if he had been a loser by the blessing, he was immediately compelled to be an outcast and an exile. Even his indulgent mother, Rebekah, proposed that her favourite son should be sent away to her native country, upon the pretence of his marrying among her kindred, but chiefly that he might be secured from his brother’s rage. Isaac consented to the plan, and dismissed Jacob in a most affectionate and devout manner, charging him not to be connected with the idolatrous Canaanites, but to seek a wife out of Laban’s family in Mesopotamia†. The benediction, before pronounced, was again solemnly confirmed; he was acknowledged “The Heir of the promise,” and prayers were offered up for his welfare and prosperity. Yet behold, what a trial of his faith! Though the Covenant was established in him, he was reduced to a most friendless and destitute condition, and exposed to various perils and severities. He was obliged

* Numb. xxiv. 19.

† Gen. xxviii. 1, &c.

to depart, without so much as one attendant, and, thus utterly unprovided, to enter upon a journey, which would have been truly formidable, from the length and dangers of it, in the most favourable circumstances.

The question arises, "How shall we account for Jacob's dismissal in so forlorn and defenceless a state? Or how shall we acquit either the father or the mother of inattention and cruelty towards him?" It may be replied, Perhaps it was necessary for him to fly away in haste, and in a secret manner, to elude the observation of Esau, who might otherwise have laid wait for him, to destroy him. And from this consideration his parents might cheerfully commend him to the care and protection of God, in firm dependence upon the promise.

Shall we advert to the peculiar designs of Providence in separating Jacob from his nearest friends and his native country, to be a servant in a very distant land, and for a long space of time? It has been intimated already, that he brought the distress upon himself by his own treacherous conduct; and therefore whatever sufferings might follow, they should be accounted as a just punishment inflicted on him for his deceit. But an additional reason may be suggested. He was to be prepared for future services; and to this end it was appointed, that he should learn that wisdom in the school of adversity, which he seemed unlikely to attain in his former domestic situation, under the eye of a fond mother. In general, we observe that those, whom God intends to fill up any distinguished station in his Church,

Church, are previously fitted for it by most painful trials. Let the hope, then, of receiving much spiritual advantage reconcile us to the severest afflictions. The Lord God may promote our highest interests by those very dispensations, which we dread or complain of as the heaviest evils.

We are now called to accompany the exiled Patriarch, through wild and inhospitable deserts, for a journey of more than four hundred miles. Little is told us of what befell him by the way. We are required to stop with him only at one place, which was ever afterwards rendered famous by what happened to him at that time. The poor benighted traveller was constrained to lie down to rest, in a most defenceless situation, with no better accommodation than the cold earth for his bed, and a stone for his pillow. But this was a season to be much remembered, probably the happiest period in his life. The ground on which he lay, seemed to be consecrated by the remarkable transactions of that night, and thence obtained the significant name of *BETHEL*, or the house of God. While he slept, he was favoured with a most singular vision, in which his devout astonishment was excited, as well by the glorious appearance which he saw, as by the words which were spoken to him. He clearly perceived a communication carried on between heaven and earth, by means of a company of bright spirits, the Angels of God, ascending and descending upon a ladder, which joined this lower world to the world above; and at the top thereof, as directing and controlling the whole, stood the Lord God Almighty, manifesting some outward token
of

of his majesty. While Jacob contemplated the wondrous sight, a voice was heard from the excellent glory, addressed immediately to him. The benediction, his father had pronounced, was then confirmed to him by God himself, who declared, that the very land, on which he slept, should be given for a possession to him and to his seed, which should be numerous "as the dust of the earth," and that One of his posterity in particular (the very Saviour promised from the beginning) should be raised up, to be an extensive blessing, even to all the different families of the human race. The Lord added, that in every place He himself would be with him, to protect and prosper him, would conduct him back again to Canaan, and not leave him, till he had fully accomplished his purposes of mercy concerning him.

Jacob awoke, confessed the presence of the Godhead, and felt an impression of the most profound reverence, when he considered before whom he stood. Constrained by a sense of the divine goodness, and encouraged by these assurances of favour, he raised a monument of gratitude, the very stone on which his head had rested, and took of the oil, which was probably part of his scanty provisions, to consecrate the pillar to God. There also, he bound himself by the most solemn engagements, to "avouch the Lord to be his God," to worship Him in that very place, upon his return to Canaan, and to devote to His service the tenth part of all his substance.

We cannot but perceive, that the consolations, here administered, were exactly suited to relieve the distresses

of Jacob: nor can we doubt, that, after what he had seen and heard that night, he proceeded upon his journey with cheerfulness and vigour. The vision of the ladder, reaching from earth to heaven, seemed intended to represent the divine Providence engaged for his benefit, and making use of the ministry of Angels to preserve and bless him. This was further explained and confirmed by the express declaration of God. And after such an assurance, what had Jacob to fear? May we not ask also, Have not Believers, in every age, the same ground of confidence? Is not the God of Jacob bound by his own promise to be their God? Under a firm persuasion, then, of this great truth, they may rejoice, and sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge*." It is likewise generally found, and it is a delightful thought, that the Lord affords his people seasonable relief, and that when outward comforts are withdrawn, then in a peculiar manner He manifests his love and presence with them, and makes all consolations to abound in them by the Holy Ghost.

What Jacob saw in this vision, is still more clearly represented to us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By Him alone, a communication is opened between God and sinners. The righteous Lord can now come down to us in mercy, and we can ascend up to him, through the mediation of his Son. To bring into effect his

* Psal. xli. 1, 2, 7.

“counsel of peace,” he employs the services of Angels, who not only “ascended and descended upon the Son of man,” during his abode on earth, but are commissioned with the most gracious embassies, and, even to this day, “sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation *.”

It has been supposed by some, and with much probability, that in the remarkable night, of which we are speaking, an important change took place in Jacob’s character, and that he then first became acquainted with true religion, and possessed of right principles. However this might be, we certainly observe a greater consistency of conduct in him, from that time; and, whatever he had been before, it will appear, that, from this solemn dedication of himself to God, he continued faithful to his vows, and walked steadfastly in the Covenant.

How necessary is the inquiry, Are we devoted to the Lord? Or, have we ever seriously entered upon a religious life? Have we given up ourselves unfeignedly to Him, who made us? In dependence on his own promise, have we “avouched the Lord to be our God?” Then, like Jacob, we must maintain a holy constancy in his ways, and labour to fulfil our engagements. But ah! we observe, that many rest satisfied in an external profession of godliness, and most awfully deceive themselves and others. How numerous the tribe of formalists and hypocrites, who say, They are the Lord’s, and yet express no real earnestness to please him!

* John i. 51. Heb. i. 14.

In accompanying Jacob through the remainder of his long and dangerous journey, we meet with no other incidents to detain us. He travelled in safety under the divine protection, and was conducted to the very place he aimed at, where Laban, his mother's brother, dwelt *. We cannot help remarking, that circumstances, which may be thought trifling and accidental, frequently determine a man's conduct and situation through the most important parts of his life. Thus it was with Jacob. His first meeting with Rachel in the field, to whom he tendered his kind services in watering her father's flocks, probably decided his future fortune in that country. It should seem, that his heart was immediately attached to her, and that his attention was recompensed with a suitable return of affection. He was received by Laban with great appearance of friendship and esteem; but Laban, whose disposition was that of a sordid, oppressive miser, endeavoured only to make an advantage of his Relation. Most readily, therefore, he embraced Jacob's proposal to serve him for seven years, on condition of obtaining his beloved Rachel to wife. The passion of Jacob was honourable, and what he did not study to conceal: and though the servitude, to which he had bound himself, was most severe and rigorous, it was sweetened by his intercourse with Rachel, and by the prospect of soon completing his wishes. "The seven years seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." But, at the expiration of the period, he was disappointed of the object of his desire, by the base artifice

* Gen. xxix 1, &c.

of her father, who contrived to secure to himself the very profitable service of his nephew. Instead of Rachel, therefore, Leah was imposed upon Jacob.

. The conduct of Laban we must condemn as treacherous and base, in every view; but can we forbear observing, that, in the providence of God, this was designed to be a just punishment to Jacob, for his own insidious treatment of his brother? He, who had practised deceit, was now made to feel the evil of it, in a most painful manner. Nor is it an unfrequent case; and it is wisely ordered by the righteous Governor of all, that sinners are severely scourged for their wickedness, by suffering the very same distresses, which they have brought upon others. May we learn to be circumspect in all things!

We cannot justify Jacob in adding one wife to another; but we do not wonder at his acceding to Laban's proposal, that he should receive the woman of his choice, on condition of serving him seven other years. It was unwise, and unlawful; but it is probable, that, had the original engagement with him been fulfilled, he would never have sought another partner of his bed, besides Rachel. Surely no argument in favour of Polygamy will be derived from this example. If we look to the sequel, enough will appear to prove, that the practice must ever tend to introduce confusion and misery into a family, and have the worst influence on the morals and disposition of the rising generation. The motley brood, born to Jacob, (some of them being most flagitious) were "as thorns in his sides." The original appointment, that two only should be

joined together, appears most favourable to domestic happiness, and to the religious education of children. "Wherefore one?" (said the Prophet) "That he might seek a godly seed *."

We attend not to the vexatious broils of Jacob's wives; observing only, that, while for fourteen years together he was oppressed by Laban's sordid and tyrannical disposition, exposed to the burning heat of the sun by day, and to the damps and chilling frosts of the night, he enjoyed not much comfort at home †. While an increasing progeny demanded his attention and support, envy and strife distracted his little circle, and embittered even his retired moments. He was tried in the barrenness of Rachel, his most favoured partner; and it seems that her unreasonable and peevish complaints, for a while at least, soured his spirit. Ah! how often does one angry speech beget another; and a warmth of temper, for a moment, interrupt the closest union, which may never perhaps be cemented again, with the same firmness as before!

Years before
Christ, 1745. At length he had a son by Rachel: but his servitude, under such an exactor as Laban, became very irksome; and no sooner was the stipulated term expired, than he desired to be dismissed, that he might be in a situation to provide for his family. This did not suit the covetous disposition of Laban, who had found, that his flocks and herds had prospered exceedingly under the care of Jacob, and was constrained to ascribe it, not only to his faithfulness, but to the blessing of God upon him. He, there-

* Mal. ii. 15.

† Gen. xxx. 1, &c. xxxi. 40.

fore, requested his continuance; and it was agreed between them, that all the cattle, which should be produced of a peculiar description, should be Jacob's property. It was expected clearly, that these would be inconsiderable in number; but very soon the chief increase was in Jacob's favour, and Laban's stock was both diminished and of a feebler kind.

It has been doubted, what opinion should be formed of Jacob's conduct, in the expedient which he made use of. It has been condemned as treacherous and dishonest. But it may be replied, that no natural principles will account for the success of his scheme; the Lord God only could make it efficacious; and therefore Jacob's riches were given him in a miraculous manner. And it should seem also, that the plan was suggested to him by immediate revelation; and in this view the Patriarch acted only in faith, depending on the divine promise: accordingly, to God he devoutly ascribed the praise *.—Shall not we likewise allow that “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich;” and that He has various ways, in his providence, “of putting down one, and setting up another?” Changes of this kind are so frequent, as to be a continual admonition to those, who have the largest possessions, “not to be high-minded,” and to encourage the hopes of such, as are most depressed in the world. What other temper or conduct becomes us, but to leave all our concerns with Him, who has a right to dispose of us, trusting and praying, that He would “feed us with food convenient for us?”

* See Gen. xxxi. 9—12.

Jacob became rich; and yet his difficulties were not removed, but rather increased. He was envied and slighted by Laban's family, and his situation rendered most uncomfortable, through their surly looks and cruel

speeches *. At length the Lord God interposed, and, by an express revelation, directed Jacob to return to Canaan, promising to be with him, to bless and protect him. Still he was afraid of Laban, who, he knew, would be averse to the proposal, and might prevent his removal. He, therefore, took the opportunity of communicating the divine command to his wives, while Laban was engaged at a distance, and, having obtained their consent, he set forwards immediately, with all his property, and as secretly as possible, to follow the guidance of Heaven, and go to his aged parent, Isaac.

One circumstance surprises and grieves us. His beloved Rachel is said to have stolen Laban's gods. It is not difficult to conjecture, for what purpose these were introduced by the father, or taken away by the daughter. A reason must be given, which will not be favourable to the character of either. But it may serve to shew, why it became expedient to remove Jacob and his family from the place, where idolatry was gaining ground, and his nearest relations were already, in some measure, seduced into it. For this very cause, we apprehend, the Lord God in mercy suffered him to be exposed to the moroseness and cruelty of Laban and his sons, that he might be the more willing to quit a situation, which, though profitable,

* Gen. xxxi. 1, &c.

was become most dangerous to the interests of true religion.

And here, for the present, we pause.—But what have we learnt from the preceding history? Jacob, the heir of the promise, the favourite of Heaven, was harassed with many and sore afflictions. Others remain to be considered. But already, we have seen him under some most distressing trials; obliged to fly from his father's house, like a vagabond or a criminal;—for fourteen years in a state of servitude;—for six more, though prospering in outward circumstances, vexed in his own family, and insulted by his other kindred;—and then, at last, compelled to steal away in order to evade the craft or the violence of Laban. Thus Jacob was admonished to seek his happiness above. And have not we, also, enough to remind us, that “here we have no continuing city?” We might be disposed to take up our rest in this world, and forget our situation and character, as strangers and pilgrims. But one calamity upon another is sent to wean our hearts from present things, and to call away our affections to a nobler object. “Arise ye, and depart, for this is not your rest.”

Where are those, who have in view the heavenly Canaan? You will not complain, that your plans, for obtaining complete satisfaction upon earth, are broken. You perceive the divine wisdom and goodness in your severest disappointments. They are calculated to detach you from your dearest possessions and enjoyments, and to make you long to be at home,

where your Father is. Thither direct your eager steps; nor fear a happy issue. The God, who was the guide and defence of Jacob, will be with you in the way, by which you go, and “will not leave you until he have done that, which he has spoken to you of.”

J A C O B.

SECT. 2.

Jacob, delivered from Laban—wrestled with God—received by Esau with the utmost kindness—settled at Succoth—removed to Bethel, and there had a fresh revelation—buried Rachel, and Isaac—partial to Joseph—mourned for him—sent his sons into Egypt—heard of Joseph, and went to him—introduced to Pharaoh—died in faith.

THE venerable Patriarch, whose character is under our consideration, had various removals from one country to another, during his state of pilgrimage; but, in all the changes of his life, the faithfulness and the mercy of God towards him were most conspicuous. Exposed to many dangers, oppressed, insulted, persecuted by furious adversaries, yet he was safe under the protection of an almighty arm. Though he was driven from kingdom to kingdom, his motions were all ordered by unerring wisdom. He was guided, preserved, and comforted by the God of heaven, who stood engaged by solemn covenant never to leave him nor forsake him.—Let us remember, that our happiness depends not upon the place, where we dwell, or upon any external circumstances. If we be favoured with the divine presence, it is comparatively of little consequence, what situation may be appointed for us, in what town, or even in what nation we may take up
our

our abode. We know, who hath said, "I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them;"—"I will dwell in them, and walk in them*." We have followed Jacob as an exile from his father's family to the distant land of Mesopotamia, where we have seen him, for many years together, as a hired servant; and afterwards, though increasing in goods, so cruelly treated by envious Relations, that he was willing to forego the prospects of further gain, to seek an asylum with his aged parent in Canaan. We are now to accompany him upon his return, as a fugitive indeed, but surrounded with a numerous household and a large train of attendants; which was a condition very different to that, wherein he had fled from home. He stole away from Laban, not ungenerously, but compelled by the cruel usage of that covetous and oppressive kinsman. In this long and perilous journey, our Patriarch, though the immediate care of Heaven, had some tremendous trials to encounter. Never had he more occasion for the exercise of faith; and never did he prove the value and comfort of religion, more than in the present instance. Laban pursued him; Esau was advancing to meet him; both intent on his destruction; yet neither of them was permitted to hurt him. Both were on the very point of executing their purpose; and both were prevented, by the immediate interposition of God in his favour. Let Israel therefore say, "If it had not been the Lord, who was on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us†."

* Ezek. xxxvii. 26. 2 Cor. vi. 16. † Psal. cxxiv. 1, &c.

To restrain the fury of Laban, who had followed him with the design, if not to offer violence to his person, at least to plunder him of all his substance, the Lord appeared in a dream, rebuking that unjust and avaricious man, and charging him to do no injury to Jacob.¹ An interview took place, in which we observe the Patriarch, with all that simplicity and magnanimity which a consciousness of integrity will inspire, defending his own character and conduct, and daring to make the appeal to his accuser, "What is my trespass? What is my sin?" Laban's scheme was defeated, and perhaps for that season his heart was softened. He requested, that a compact of amity might be made between them, to which Jacob readily consented, and thereby testified the meek and pacific disposition of his mind. We are pleased to perceive the contest issuing in a friendly entertainment, and both parties pledging their faith, by all the solemnities of religious rites, and promising to abstain from all hostile attempts upon each other.

Rescued from this perilous situation, Jacob pursued his journey; and by the way (probably to encourage his hope, and to prepare him for succeeding trials) a host of Angels appeared to him †. Those "ministering spirits," we apprehend, were sent from heaven, on purpose to assure him of the divine support; and of such support he then stood in especial need. Another and more formidable difficulty awaited him. The dread of his brother's anger filled him with perplexity. Alas! how soon do we forget past deliverances! How

* Gen. xxxi. 22, &c.

† Gen. xxxii. 1, &c.

soon are we dejected at the approach of every new danger! Yet Jacob's conduct upon that occasion discovered both prudence and piety. When he drew near to the possessions of Esau, he sent messengers before him, in order to announce his coming, and thus to procure him a favourable reception. He had flattered himself, doubtless, that the ancient quarrel was forgotten; but was then informed, that Esau was advancing against him with an armed body of four hundred men. The intelligence, which was truly alarming, excited in Jacob the utmost consternation. He trembled for himself,—for his wives and his children,—especially for his beloved Rachel and her favourite son Joseph.. What was to be done? To oppose force by force was impracticable in his situation. But prudential means, and those to which Jacob's disposition rather inclined him, were adopted. Not to mention, that he divided his numerous train into two bands, so that, if one were cut off, the other might escape; with much discretion, as well as with great meekness of spirit, he prepared, and sent before him, some very valuable presents for Esau, professing subjection to him, and soliciting regard.

This was not all: it was not the chief expedient. Whither shall a servant of God fly, in extreme distress, but to the throne of grace? There is his last, his best resource; and there alone are security and consolation to be found. It is observable also, that afflictions make us feel the unspeakable value of this privilege, and increase our fervency in prayer. Thus Jacob, under the dread of his brother, cried mightily to Heaven, with deep

deep humiliation and with lively faith, urging his petitions for deliverance with pleas derived from the Covenant, the promises, and the past mercies of God. It should seem that Jacob spent a considerable part of the night, previous to his meeting Esau, in earnest supplication, and received an immediate and abundant recompence.

A very singular circumstance is described, which, in the simple narration of the fact, may appear dark and mysterious; but so much at least will be clear and indisputable, as may serve to encourage our most importunate application to God, and an unshaken trust in Him.—“Jacob was left alone,” having sent the whole of his family before him, that with less interruption he might seek help and comfort from above: “and there wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day.”—We are led to inquire, Who was the person; and what the nature, purpose, and issue of the contest? It was One in human shape, but of a rank superior to our species, who came as an adversary to Jacob, while he was praying to be delivered from his brother’s fury. It was an Angel, the great Angel of the Covenant, who frequently manifested himself to his ancient saints in the same way, as partaker of our flesh: and the Patriarch afterwards perceived, it was no other than “The Lord from heaven;” for he said, “I have seen God face to face.” This divine person stood to oppose his servant, as it were to resist his entrance into Canaan; but in gracious condescension he suffered Jacob to contend with him, and put strength into him to maintain the contest, and even to prevail. The victory

tory was yielded; but the conqueror was made to feel and to remember his own weakness. By a touch of the Angel, Jacob's thigh was out of joint; and so it continued, in order that it might be a standing memorial of the transaction. He confessed, then, the superiority and the high dignity of his heavenly antagonist; but at the same time, he was encouraged to form that holy determination, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." This also, which was the request (we had almost said, the claim) of faith, was granted; and, in testimony of his acceptance, a new name was given him, which should perpetuate the remembrance of his prevalency with God: "Thy name (said the Angel) shall be called no more Jacob, but ISRAEL; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and with men, and hast prevailed. And He blessed him there."—Struck with the amazing grace of the divine Visitant, the Patriarch expressed his gratitude, and commemorated the kindness he had experienced in that night, whilst he called the place by a significant title, PENIEL; "For (said he) I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

The situation of Jacob may lead us to a probable conjecture, respecting the design of this very singular occurrence. It seems intended to represent to him the approaching opposition of his brother Esau, which filled him with terror; but, by the issue of his conflict with the Angel, he was taught to expect, that God would, in the end, grant him good success.

The nature of the agony, on Jacob's part, appears to have consisted, principally, in the strongest and most importunate

importunate cries for help and deliverance. And to that interpretation we are directed by the comment of an inspired Prophet; "By his strength he had power with God; yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him *."

It will become us to inquire, What instruction is hereby conveyed to us? This little history stands as a monument, to all ages, of the Lord's faithfulness and love towards those who fear him. Every child of the promise, every true Israelite, like his father Jacob, will not only know the way of access to God, but, as it were, wrestle with Him in a spiritual agony, importunately pleading for mercy, and resolving not to desist from the most fervent petitions, till some favourable answer be received. Nor is it presumption thus to besiege the throne of grace: the command, the promise of God encourage us to it. Our Lord himself has taught us, "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint †." We shall not, indeed, "be heard for our much speaking," yet those only will obtain the blessing, who so ask it, as to prove that they most cordially desire it, and who, by a holy violence, wrest it out of the hands of God ‡. He will suffer himself to be overcome by his praying people, and "no good thing will he withhold from them §." He will arm them for the conflicts, which await them; the greater their extremity is, the more will his power and love be manifested in their support and deliverance; and, ere long, they

* Hof. xii. 3, 4.

† Luk. xviii. 1.

‡ Matt. xi. 12.

§ Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved them *."

Divine consolations have a happy tendency to prepare the soul for trials, and inspire it with courage to resist its strongest enemies.—What then had Jacob to fear from man, favoured as he was with repeated and clear testimonies, that the God of heaven was on his side? We doubt not that the Patriarch pursued his journey from PENUEL with alacrity and fortitude, though he had every thing to apprehend from Esau's fury. But the firmest confidence in God does not supersede the use of all proper means to obtain relief. With admirable prudence, therefore, Jacob sent forward his presents to Esau, and instructed the different parts of his large company to speak to him with such meekness of wisdom, as might tend to appease his anger, and produce a reconciliation. At length he drew near, and bowed himself seven times before him †. The effect was such as he desired: his prayers were answered. The storm, he had so much dreaded, was suddenly blown over, and a delightful calm succeeded. Instead of a fierce or bloody conflict, we behold nothing but marks of the warmest affection between the two brothers, as if there had never been any variance or contention. Esau, melted down to kindness, and forgetting his designs of violence against Jacob, "ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept." Tokens of mutual regard were exchanged between them; and they parted from each other in peace and love.

* Rom. viii. 37.

† Gen. xxxiii. 1, &c.

This was a singular event. Never was there a more striking proof of the truth of Solomon's observation, "A soft answer turneth away wrath*." May we learn, for our own sake, if not for that of others, to "overcome evil with good†."

But in Jacob's deliverance from Esau and Laban, the two furious adversaries, who were coming against him, we are constrained to acknowledge the divine interposition. "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth," and exerciseth a strong influence, even over those who obstinately refuse submission. They cast off their obedience to him, and yet they fulfil his purposes; to accomplish which, they frequently renounce their own plans, though they can assign no reason for their sudden change of conduct. In this view, those, who are possessed of highest power, are but as His vassals, and employed as His instruments, to effect the very schemes they had intended to defeat. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever he will‡." The consideration may well fill us with reverence and awe before the Almighty Sovereign, at whose entire disposal we are. Those, who have committed themselves to his care, may derive encouragement from the subject. Though many dangers beset them, and, like Jehoshaphat, they "know not what to do§;" He, whom they serve, can instantly blast the designs of their most formidable opposers, or convert them into cordial friends. "When a man's ways

* Prov. xv. 1.

† Rom. xii. 21.

‡ Prov. xxi. 1.

§ 2 Chron. xx. 12.

please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him*.”

The two brothers, we have seen, separated with mutual professions of benevolence: and Jacob, having arrived at the land of Canaan, prepared a settlement for himself and his family. He built him an house at Succoth, and bought a field at Shechem, where also he erected an altar, in order to testify his gratitude to that God who had preserved him, and to call the attention of the idolatrous people around him to true religion. In this place, probably, the Patriarch might indulge the pleasing hope of obtaining a fixed abode after his wearisome journies, and expect to see an end of his troubles.—Alas! we are all prone to flatter ourselves, in a time of ease, that our trials are over, when, it may be, we are but just entering on the conflict. We are desirous to gain an established residence, and consider ourselves at home, where we are but sojourners for a short season, and where we shall find no rest for the sole of our foot.

How soon were Jacob's prospects clouded! Instead of repose and comfort, in his external circumstances he had little else but vexation and disappointment. Ere long, some threatening storms gathered around him. But, under them all, we shall perceive the good man supported by the consolations of God.

Years before
Christ, 1732.

Dinah, his only daughter, brought herself and him to shame, whilst, through her vanity and love of pleasure, she ventured among “the daughters of the land,” and then fell a prey to the lust

* Prov. xvi. 7.

of a neighbouring prince *. This was not all. The heart of the pious parent, bleeding for the sin of one child, was pierced with still deeper sorrows for the base treachery and wanton barbarity of two of his sons. The young men, Simeon and Levi, to avenge the injury done to their sister, first deceived the Shechemites, under the pretence of bringing them over to their religion, then plundered the city, and destroyed all the males that were therein. Upon this occasion, Jacob was almost overwhelmed, and gave way to many gloomy apprehensions. “Ye have troubled me (said he), to make me stink among the inhabitants of the land: and, I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.”

Our fears are ever ready to magnify our danger. Perhaps Jacob might for a while lose sight of the promise, and “stagger through unbelief.” But we own there appeared just ground for his alarm, circumstanced as he then was; and it is to be ascribed only to the divine interposition, that both he and his family were not entirely cut off. The Lord was his guide and defence; and therefore, to preserve him from the violent assaults, which the Canaanites would have made upon him, He commanded him to remove to Bethel, the very place, where he had been first favoured with the revelations of God, in the day of his extremity †. The pious Patriarch obeyed; and instantly prepared to dedicate himself anew to the service of his God.—In what way shall we expect communications with Heaven?

* Gen. xxxiv. 1, &c. † xxxv. 1. &c.

Let us learn from Jacob; especially when we are going to seal our vows before the Lord, to "put away the evil of our doings," and to "walk in our house with a perfect heart:" For how shall the Holy One of Israel visit us, if He behold iniquity in our tents?—Immediately, therefore, Jacob set himself to purge his family from the idolatry, which, it seems, had crept in among them: and while, with uprightness of mind and unfeigned devotedness, he sought the Lord, he obtained a most gracious answer. Former promises were confirmed, and the everlasting Covenant was again declared to be established in him and in his seed. This was a memorable season; and herein the conduct of Jacob appears most amiable. We cannot but perceive in him the clearest marks of warmest gratitude and most fervent piety towards God. Hence the altar was built, and inscribed to the God of Bethel; hence a monumental pillar, to perpetuate the transaction, was erected; and other religious rites were performed.

Are not we also under the highest obligations to seek the Lord? We expect not, indeed, the same kind of immediate revelations from him; nor are they needed. But, in a very important sense, He will be found of them who seek him. Where, then, is the place, which has witnessed our vows to him, or intercourse with him? Is there no Bethel, to which we can refer, where the Lord has blessed us, and where we have set up a pillar for his name?

We mentioned the danger of Jacob's being pursued by the enraged Canaanites. It appears, that they had formed some design of violence against him, and were restrained,

restrained, by a secret influence upon their minds, from carrying it into execution. "THE TERROR OF GOD was upon the cities that were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob*." He, who has the care of his own people, can never want means to defend them; and, even where no outward means are used, in an invisible but most powerful manner he wards off assaults from them, and pleads their cause against their adversaries. "Who art thou, then, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die,—and forgettest the Lord thy Maker,—and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? And where is the fury of the oppressor †?"

Jacob removed from place to place in the land of Canaan. But, though in Covenant with God, and conducted in safety under His protection, he met new difficulties in almost every new situation. As he travelled from Bethel, Rachel, his most beloved partner, was suddenly taken from him, and in such circumstances as must have greatly aggravated his distress. She brought forth Benjamin, and expired. Soon afterwards he suffered extremely through the base behaviour of Reuben, his first-born, who defiled the bed, by committing incest with Bilhah, the wife, of his own father. The uncleanness also of Judah, his marriage with a Canaanitish woman, and his unnatural connection with his own daughter-in-law, must have been beyond measure afflictive to the pious parent ‡.—Ah! what a checkered scene is human life! How many oc-

* Gen. xxxv. 5. † Isa. li. 12, 13. ‡ Gen. xxxviii. 1, &c.

currences may imbitter the sweetest comforts! It is not easy to say, whether our sharpest trials arise from the loss of dear and valuable friends, or from the perverseness and misconduct of those, who are left behind.

Our Patriarch came at length to Isaac, his venerable sire, who was still living; and, it should seem, they enjoyed some years of tranquillity in the most pleasing society with each other. But the hour of separation must arrive, and break the ties of the closest union. Years before
Christ 1716. on. "Isaac gave up the ghost;" and the painful office, of committing their honoured father to the grave, devolved upon his sons. On that occasion we observe the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, concurring in the same filial duty; from which we conclude, there was a firm and permanent reconciliation between them.

We have already perceived the good man before us much afflicted, on account of the shameful practices he had witnessed in his own offspring; and it will be allowed that trials of this nature are peculiarly distressing. We are hastening to others of like sort, which were far heavier to him than all he had before met with, and almost proved superior to his strength. And yet to himself may be attributed much of the following calamity. He laid the foundation for some destructive jealousies among his children, by a decided partiality, an avowed preference of one to all the rest. "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours *."—It is a misfortune to parents to have

* Gen. xxxvii. 3.

a favourite; and yet, perhaps, they cannot entirely command their affections. But surely, they should study to conceal an undue attachment, and not proclaim it by any mark of distinction, which may tend to excite envy and contention. How much prudence and circumspection are necessary, in the education of a rising family!

Years before
Christ, 1729.

We shall not now anticipate the history of Joseph, with which that of Jacob is, from this period, closely connected. It appears, that the fond father expected something remarkable from the son, to whose prophetic dreams it is observed that he paid great regard. But soon, were his hopes blasted, and succeeded by the utmost anguish. Joseph's coat was brought to him stained with blood; and he hastily concluded, "An evil beast had devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." As his affection had not been confined within proper bounds, we do not wonder that his sorrow was extreme; and yet, we severely condemn that excessive lamentation for the dead, which arises from a want of submission to God, and discovers much impatience and discontent. "He refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son, mourning."—May we not justly fear, that those creatures, either persons or things, which have too large a share of our attention and esteem, will be taken from us, or prove to us the source of some peculiar calamities? In this case, the recollection of our own folly will aggravate our misery.

Years before Christ, 1707. A considerable time elapsed, during which the sacred history relates nothing of Jacob or his family in Canaan. At length a famine arose, of such large extent and long continuance, as to threaten entire destruction to all the neighbouring countries. This was the fore visitation of an angry God upon those idolatrous and abandoned nations. But Jacob also partook of the general distress: for both he and his household were reduced to the greatest straits. To procure a supply of food, he sent his ten sons into Egypt, reserving only Benjamin, who was the support of his declining years, and peculiarly dear to him after the loss of Joseph, as being the sole pledge, which then remained to him, of his beloved Rachel *. Corn was obtained as a temporary relief to them, in this time of dearth; but another affliction oppressed the aged Patriarch, and it seemed as if he would have sunk under the weight. Simeon was detained a prisoner in Egypt; and Benjamin was demanded. This was more than he could bear. In the anguish of his soul he cried out, "Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me." He refused, then, to submit to the condition of parting with Benjamin: "My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my grey-hairs with sorrow to the grave." But the fear of perishing by hunger at length prevailed over his affection, and he consented, though reluctantly, that Benjamin

* Gen. xlii. 1, &c.

should accompany his brethren, in their second journey to Egypt *. With much prudence he desired them to conciliate the Governor's favour by a present, and with real piety commended them all to the care and protection of Heaven : " God Almighty give you mercy before the man ! "

It may appear wonderful (in this as in some other instances), that one so beloved of God should be left in circumstances so extremely painful. Again and again, he was almost in want of food to eat ; and, instead of deriving comfort from his children, he suffered more from their perverseness, than from the famine. This will teach us, that, though the Lord will surely provide for his people, and his promise cannot fail, He may yet leave them to such difficulties, as to convince them that their help must come from Him. We perceive also, that it may be the portion of one, truly and eminently pious, to have a forward and a wicked offspring. A serious attention to what mankind are and have been, would effectually cure us of an eager desire to obtain a numerous progeny, and preserve us from any fond expectations of felicity from this source. O let us beware of setting too high a value upon any creature, or of seeking our happiness in any thing short of God ! He demands our hearts ; and, in great mercy, he may permit us to be disappointed in our most sanguine hopes from earthly objects, that we may give our best affections to Him. While, therefore, every thing else deceives us, do we not feel the value of His friendship ? And are we not hereby taught, to sit more loose

to the enjoyments of the world, and to cleave more steadfastly to God? Doubtless, He has many wise and gracious purposes to be answered by the severest visitations of his providence towards his people. In this way, so painful to them, he answers their prayers,—fulfils his own promises,—purges away their corruptions,—and gradually prepares them for heaven. It is not so with the wicked. Their very prosperity proves a snare to them; and the afflictions, which they must meet with as the common lot of humanity, are only, to them, the beginning of sorrows. Let their situation in life be what it may, “the wrath of God abideth on them,” and shortly they will receive, in full weight and measure, the recompence due to their iniquities.

But was the spirit and behaviour of Jacob such as we might have wished it, in the distresses to which we are adverting? Ah! no. We allow, there was much imperfection; and we are hence admonished to look well to ourselves. “He made haste,” spoke rashly and presumptuously, when he said, “All these things are against me.” For, in fact, the very calamities, he most lamented, were the means of his preservation and future comfort. But when we see Israel fainting under the pressure of his misfortunes, we do not wonder, that some of the dear children of God among ourselves are staggered by their trials, and ready to cast away their hope. When our favourite schemes are suddenly blasted, and one disappointment follows upon another, we are all forward to conclude, as Jacob did, “All these things are against me.” Alas! how great is our blindness!

blindness! How extreme our perverseness! Who are we, that we should undertake to decide upon the judgments of God? Would we take the reins of government out of his hands? Let us be willing, that He should have the entire disposal of us; and, if indeed we are persuaded of his wisdom, love, and faithfulness, let us rest assured, without enquiring a reason for his conduct, that "He hath done all things well;" and let us patiently wait for an explanation, till the end come. "What he does, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

We hasten to the close of Jacob's life, when the prospect cleared up, and brighter days were reserved for him. His children returned, and brought him tidings, that Joseph, his long-lost son, was still living, that he presided as Governor over the land of Egypt, and had sent for him and for all his household, to nourish and protect them in the time of famine*. The effect of this account upon Jacob's mind was such as we might have expected. He was overpowered by it: he knew not how to credit it. "His heart fainted; for he believed them not." But at length the evidence was so strong, that his doubts and fears were all dispersed. "His spirit revived: and Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him, before I die."

Years before
Christ, 1706. We are now therefore to accompany him in his last remove, from Canaan to Egypt; a formidable journey, to one so far advanced in life. But he had an infallible Guide, an Almighty Protec-

* Gen. xlv. 25, &c.

tor; and in dependence upon Him, the Patriarch set forward with all his offspring, and with all his substance. When he came to Beersheba (the place where his father Isaac had dwelt, and had been favoured with the revelations of God), he halted, in order that he might acknowledge his firm trust and confidence in the God whom Isaac had worshipped there, and seek His direction and support in this most important change of situation*. Possibly the thought might arise in his mind; "I may be counteracting the design of God, in thus transplanting myself and my whole family from the very land, which He hath promised to give us." But in answer to his prayer, the Lord God appeared, and comforted him with the assurance, that He himself would go down with him into Egypt, there multiply his posterity, and in due time bring them up again to Canaan. This was enough.—And are not we hereby instructed and encouraged to worship the Lord, and ask His guidance and protection, in the way by which we go? "He is faithful who hath promised," and "He hath not said unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain." While his people make known their fears and their distresses to him, he will not fail to give them fresh intimations of his favour.

The desire of Jacob's heart was gratified. He was preserved through his journey, and permitted to see his beloved Joseph again. What an affecting scene is exhibited before us, while we behold the mutual embraces of the father and the son! It were difficult to say, whether the dutifulness of the one, or the love of the

* Gen. xlv. 1, &c.

other, exceeded. "And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen; and presented himself unto him: and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive!"

When our Patriarch arrived in Egypt, he was conducted to court, and introduced by Joseph to the notice of the King*. Nor was he ashamed of his religion, even there; but, avowing his profession of the true God, and appearing as His priest and minister, "he blessed Pharaoh." A question was proposed to him, respecting his age, to which with great seriousness he replied, that his continuance upon earth was only like that of a sojourner, short and uncertain; that his fathers had lived to a longer period; and that his own days, numerous as they might seem, had been few and very full of trouble. "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage." This is not the language of discontent or unthankfulness, but the serious reflection of one, who felt the vanity of the world, and saw nothing here to make him desirous of a longer abode in it.

Shall not we also make the same estimate of human life? Is it not "a pilgrimage?" And does not the whole of our situation here admonish us to "seek a bet-

* Gen. xlvii. 7, &c.

ter country, that is, an heavenly?" Seventy or eighty years may seem a considerable space, while it is future, but it passeth away "as a tale that is told." It should also be remembered, that, short as our existence is, it is sadly imbittered with calamities, and stained with sin. Take, then, "the picture of earth's happiest man," when he is quitting the present scene of things, and you will justly conclude, "FEW AND EVIL have his days begun."

Years before
Christ, 1689.

Jacob continued in a state of great prosperity, and enjoyed the society of his dear son, Joseph, for seventeen years more; and these were, probably, the most comfortable he had ever spent. But "Israel must die," and, when he felt his dissolution approaching, he sent for Joseph, and with much solemnity requested, that he might be removed out of Egypt, and buried in the burying place of his ancestors.—Why such a concern about the interment of the body? Why such an eager desire to be carried into the land of Canaan? This was not an unmeaning petition; but herein he testified his firm belief, that, according to the divine promise, Canaan would be given to his seed for an inheritance; and he foretold the return of his posterity into that country.

How venerable does the Patriarch appear in his last moments! Not to mention, with what fervent piety he blessed Joseph, and prayed for his two sons*; how awful was the meeting of his twelve children around his dying bed, whilst, under the immediate influence

* Gen. xlviii.

of the Holy Spirit, he pronounced his parental benediction upon them, and predicted the future condition of their descendants, even "in the last days*."—It would be foreign to our purpose to dwell upon each part of this remarkable prophecy; but the blessing, appropriated to the tribe of Judah, is so interesting, and the subject of it so suited to our design, that we cannot overlook it.

Reuben, the first-born, because of his iniquity, was deprived of his birth-right, the temporal privileges of which were then transferred to Joseph (1 Chron. v. 1, 2): but the most excellent portion of all was reserved for Judah; for upon him the promises of the Covenant made with Abraham were entailed. Jacob had regard to the grand object of this Covenant, the coming of the Redeemer, when he testified, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until SHILOH come: and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."

A declaration this, upon which it will become us to fix our most serious attention. It contains a more express prophecy of the Saviour, than any which had been given before, and furnishes us with an unanswerable proof, that our Jesus is He, of whom Jacob spoke. It was therein determined, from what particular branch of that family the Messiah should descend, and at what period he should appear in the world. To both these circumstances the history of Jesus answers exactly, but in no other person are they, or can they be, fulfilled.

* Gen. xlix.*

The time, here pointed out, must, upon every fair calculation, have long since elapsed; and therefore, if He be not the very Christ, the prediction has failed, and the scripture is broken. But we admire the providence of God, which "hath raised up an horn of salvation," according to the expectation of his ancient saints. Under His watchful eye, and Almighty protection, the tribe of Judah was preserved, while all the rest were dispersed, and the legislative power was maintained therein, till the coming of Jesus. But the sceptre is now departed, neither have the Jews had any lawgiver, for above seventeen hundred years. When our Lord was upon earth, they acknowledged, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death*;" and they have never since been able to gain any establishment in any country. We conclude, then, that Jesus is the true "Shiloh," the peace-maker; and "unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." "He gathers together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad†;" for, whenever the tribes of Israel shall be recovered from their dispersion, their eyes shall be towards Jesus, under whom they will be again united, and incorporated with the Gentiles. "He is lifted up, that he may draw all men unto him‡."

In firm dependence upon this Redeemer, and in earnest desire for the completion of his grace, the dying Patriarch, in the midst of his address to his children, cried out, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord!" Thus, at the age of one hundred and forty-

* John xviii. 31. † xi. 52. ‡ xii. 32.

seven years, he closed his afflicted life, in faith, and peace, and joy. Many and sore conflicts he had struggled with; but the issue was most blessed. Shall we not learn from him, to look forward, through the darkest dispensations of providence, with a blissful expectation of that "glory, which shall be revealed?" Nothing else will support us under trials, or even render our comforts pleasant to us. But hereby the terror of death will be removed; and we shall rejoice in the hope of meeting, not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but all that illustrious company, whether they have gone before, or may follow after us, of whom it will be said, "These are they, which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*."

* Rev. vii. 14.

J O S E P H.

C H A P. X.

S E C T. I.

Joseph, hated by his brethren—his dreams—sold to the Midianites—taken to Egypt and sold to Potiphar, whom he served faithfully—resisted the temptation of his mistress—cast into prison—favoured by the jailor—interpreted the dreams of the king's officers—yet left in prison.

THE same Almighty Lord, who made all things, sustains and governs the works of his own hands. Nor are the proofs of his Providence less numerous, or less obvious than those which demonstrate his Existence. We can give no consistent account of any past events, or present occurrences, except we allow, "Verily there is a God, that judgeth the earth." The history before us is, perhaps, of all others, the strongest confirmation of this truth; and, in that view, it claims the most serious attention of every reader. For will it not be of the highest advantage to perceive, in other instances, the mysterious ways of God, that we may not quarrel with them in our own case? A firm belief that the divine Being is continually superintending and directing all the concerns of all his creatures, must have the happiest effects upon our minds, as we pass through the different changes of life. This will explain difficulties,
or

or at least silence our objections, will dispel our fears, alleviate our sorrows, and point out to us a never-failing source of consolation, while we behold the Almighty Sovereign, by a power which cannot be controlled, and yet in a wise, holy, and gracious manner, disposing of all persons and events, in all the various parts, not of this world only, but of his universal dominion. Opposition may be raised against his government, and his purposes may thereby seem to be thwarted; but, amidst all apparent interruptions, He is uniformly pursuing and completing his own design. His plans cannot possibly be defeated. The very schemes of his enemies not only, in the end, turn to their confusion, but are, throughout, subservient to his will.

A slight attention, as to other cases, so especially to the present example, will also soon convince us, that there is an astonishing connection of events in the divine administration. Nothing can properly be called trifling or accidental. That, which may be thought the most minute and inconsiderable circumstance, may be a necessary link in the great chain, and may therefore be the means of accomplishing the most important counsels.

But in the character, we are now to review, we shall perceive something more than God's general government; we shall discover his peculiar care over his Church, and his holy determination, according to his promise, to make "all things work together for good, to them that love him."

In Joseph is displayed an exemplary pattern of goodness, in very different situations of life. Let us admire the grace of God, which gave him such excellent wisdom, and instructed him, "both to be full, and to be hungry, both to abound, and to suffer need." Those, who are reduced to the most abject condition, as well as men of most exalted rank, may place this instance before them, and learn from Joseph what they themselves ought to be.

Years before
Christ 1729.

The history of Joseph opens with an account of the remarkable trials, which were appointed for him even in his youth. He is first of all introduced to our notice, as exposed to the cruel hatred and malicious designs of his brethren. Do we ask, What excited their resentment? Various causes concurred. His serious deportment, at the early age of seventeen, was as irksome to them, as their evil practices were to him. He had observed with grief some iniquitous conduct in them, and had reported it to his father*. That alone would have made them his enemies. For it cannot be that sinners will love those, who separate from them through an abhorrence of their wickedness, and testify against it. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly†."

But another reason is assigned: He was the favourite child. Jacob, whom we have already censured on this account, had conceived, and was imprudent enough to discover, a stronger affection for him than for the rest. This preference might seem to reflect an honour on the

* Gen. xxxvii. 2, &c. † Amos v. 10.

young man's character; but it was, evidently, the source of many calamities to him. "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age." He probably was the companion, and the comfort, of his old age, as being more observant of him, and more pleasing to him, for the gravity of his disposition. "And he made him a coat of many colours." The distinction, we presume, betrayed the weakness of the parent, and, though intended as a kindness, proved a serious misfortune to the son. "The coat of many colours" might be in itself of little value, but, as a mark of superior regard, it naturally excited envy and disgust in those, who had, or thought they had, an equal right to paternal favour. "And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."—Young persons would do well to remember, that, however they should prize the affection of their parents, if they desire to be set up above the rest, as the objects of peculiar notice and respect in the family, they are laying the foundation for much unhappiness to themselves, as well as to others.

It must be a rare instance, in which a darling child is not a corrupt character. The constant attention bestowed upon him is likely to produce the worst effects upon his mind; to make him forward, petulant, and overbearing. It does not appear that this was the case with Joseph. But if it should be thought that he was somewhat assuming in his deportment, at the time we here refer to, we are disposed rather to pity, than

severely censure him, at such an age, and in such circumstances.

It was the divine purpose to exalt Joseph to a state of great eminence; which was very early made known to him by two prophetic dreams. It was intimated, that his brethren, even all his father's house, should bow down, and express their submission to him. Had he been possessed of more prudence, he would studiously have concealed the matter. But from juvenile simplicity, and perhaps from some little exultation in the most distant prospect of so flattering an event, he told his dreams without any reserve, and thereby drew a large share of odium upon himself. "His brethren envied him, and hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words."

Here, then, the plan of the history opens upon us. God had determined, for some special reasons, to place Joseph in a state of high dignity; and this counsel, so offensive to his brethren, it was their grand aim and study to defeat. But how vain is all opposition to God! By all their malicious contrivances, they were so far from preventing, or retarding, the exaltation of Joseph, that they were the very means of accomplishing the prophecies, they had derided. "The Lord of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it*?"

Whilst they were engaged, at a considerable distance, in their occupation as shepherds, Joseph visited them, upon the kind errand of enquiring after their welfare.

* Isa. xiv. 27.

But how was he rewarded for his labour of love? Not to mention the difficulties and dangers he met with by the way, he no sooner appeared in their sight, than they conspired against his life. "Behold," (said they) "this dreamer cometh. Come, now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see, what will become of his dreams." It is remarkable, how their scheme was frustrated. Most unaccountably to us, Reuben, (whose character was not the best) was inclined to favour him, and to rescue him out of their hands; and therefore he proposed to cast him alive into some deep pit. This plan was adopted; and immediately the poor trembling youth, utterly disregarded while in the anguish of his soul he besought their compassion, was stript of his envied finery, "his coat of many colours," and thrown into the pit. It was Reuben's design to deliver him, and restore him to his father; and, probably, he very soon left the company to make preparations for this purpose. But his counsel of mercy was over-ruled; for, in his absence, it was recommended to them by Judah, (perhaps through covetousness, more than any misgivings of conscience) that they should take up their brother again, and sell him for a slave to some Midianitish merchants, who were at that instant passing by them on their route for Egypt. It was supposed, that, being consigned to slavery in a foreign land, he would never be heard of more; and that his prophetic dreams of dominion would be as effectually defeated, as if his blood had

been shed. The proposal, therefore, was acceded to; and he was sold for twenty pieces of silver, and given up into the hands of strangers.

Shall we not pause a moment to reflect upon the iniquitous conduct of the brethren? It does not appear, that they were then struck with horror at their own wickedness. And yet ashamed and afraid to avow what they had done, (for sin dares not to shew itself in open daylight, but ever seeks for a cover) they studied to conceal their guilt, especially from their aged parent, and therefore practised a base deception. The coat, which had caused their jealousy, they brought to Jacob dipped in blood; from which it was concluded, Joseph had been devoured of wild beasts, and no further enquiry was made after him.—Thus, it is possible, the most flagitious actions may, for a while, elude the public eye; and the consciences of sinners may be so stupified as not greatly to disturb them. But may we not say to them, as Moses to the Reubenites, “Be sure your sin will find you out*?” Perhaps even here, your schemes of villany, transacted in darkness, shall all be published to the world, and your own souls filled with insupportable anguish, at the recollection of what you have done. This, at least, will certainly take place hereafter, and a solemn day of reckoning it will be, “when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.”

But to return to the amiable youth, now reduced to a very low state indeed: he was conveyed into Egypt, and there disposed of by the Midianites, like the cattle which are transferred from one master to

* Num, xxxii. 23.

another. It will soon appear, however, that he was under the care of God, who over-ruled the whole of this strange history, sent him to this distant country "to save much people alive," and provided a house for his reception. He was sold to Potiphar, a man of some rank, and a principal officer in the King's army.

And here we have to contemplate Joseph in a different situation. He had already approved himself as an affectionate and dutiful son; now we shall perceive his most exemplary conduct as a servant. Doubtless it would be particularly difficult for him, who had been brought up with much tenderness, to conform to the duties of this new condition; but the grace of God fitted him for his place, and enabled him to perform the offices of it with diligence and fidelity. In this way the Lord put an honour upon him, and gave him such favour with his master, as to render his servitude less irksome to him. The divine blessing, which is the real source of all prosperity, accompanied Joseph in a most conspicuous manner; for success attended all his concerns. He was upright, active, and faithful; and thus, while he did not conceal his religion, the truth and excellency of it were seen and acknowledged. This could not but strike Potiphar's observation, who soon found his advantage in Joseph's service, and therefore raised him to a higher post, made him steward over all his household, and committed all his affairs, without reserve, to his care and management; and "the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake *."

* Gen. xxxix. 1, &c.

This is a suitable occasion for observing, that the very lowest situation, and the most servile offices are not to be thought contemptible; nay, they are highly honourable, since the Lord may be glorified in them, and some of the most excellent characters have been appointed to them. Nor let us suppose, that to be reduced to poor circumstances, is, of consequence, to be miserable. Perhaps Joseph experienced more real happiness in his attendance upon Potiphar, than under the indulgent eye of his father. We know, at least, that the Lord's presence alone can render any place truly comfortable to us, and this was most eminently vouchsafed to Joseph, while he was a servant. It is this, which constitutes the felicity of heaven, and those, who are favoured with a measure of it upon earth, ought not to complain that they are in a mean condition, or subject to the will of another.

But while the example before us may encourage those, who are in a state of servitude, it will also instruct them. Doubtless they suffer peculiar trials; those of them especially, who are possessed of genuine piety, and fixed in the families of ignorant and profane persons. Still it should be remembered, that under such circumstances they have an opportunity of recommending their principles to others, in the most forcible manner. But, in this respect, their actions will have a stronger influence than their words; and the excellence of their religion will best appear by the consistency of their conduct. Let them discover the same meekness and integrity as Joseph, and it will be confessed that the Lord is with them of a truth. They will

will be honoured and valued; and even men of the world, who despise all profession of godliness, will find it for their advantage, to have attendants of this kind about them. We trust, there are many, who thus “adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour.” We doubt not, that the blessing of God is upon many houses, entirely for the sake of those, who are employed in the lowest offices. Their fidelity and diligence will, of themselves, do much, but their prayers will do more, to secure temporal success to their masters. Ah! how different the case of those servants, who know not God! However well they may be qualified for their work, in other respects, if they bring with them corrupt principles, and a contempt of every thing serious, they are to be dreaded, and must prove a pest to the families where they dwell.

But let the most upright prepare their souls for temptation, nor wonder if their characters be aspersed. “The Lord was with Joseph;” and yet he was exposed to the strongest solicitations to sin, and aspersed with the foulest reproaches. But, though violently assaulted, he was not overcome; and, though cruelly censured and oppressed, to God he could cheerfully commit his cause. An eminent pattern of chastity is here exhibited. We are called to behold the powerful efficacy of true religion in the heart, as a preservative against all allurements to evil.

The story is related in the most artless manner. Joseph’s mistress, struck with the beauty of his person, fixed her lustful eyes upon him, and, avowing her base desires, invited him to sin with her. The
pious

pious youth rejected the proposal with abhorrence, and represented to this shameless woman, what heinous and complicated guilt it would be in him to yield to her enticements. The trust reposed in him,—the obligations he owed his master, for his kind and generous treatment,—but above all, the authority, the holiness, of God,—forbad his compliance. For thus he argued; How shall I betray my trust? How shall I act so vile and ungrateful a part to my master?—But especially, “How can I do this great wickedness, and SIN AGAINST GOD?”

The temptation was not offered once only, but repeated day by day: and alas! there are few, who can stand against continual sollicitations, however manfully they may resist for a time. But we learn in Joseph to suspect our own strength, and to fly from that situation, which is dangerous, and may be fatal, to our virtue. In many cases, even to parley with the enemy is to give him an advantage against us. Joseph not only refused to listen to her words, but, as much as possible, avoided her presence. Ah! how many are vanquished through a confidence of their own ability! They venture into those places and connections, in which they are constantly exposed to the most severe attacks, and suppose themselves capable of maintaining the conflict. But, though they may escape one thrust and another, at length they are found off their guard, are wounded, and overcome. A warning to us, that we run not into temptation.

The historian relates one violent onset in particular, wherein Joseph's chastity was assaulted. His mistress,

mistress, probably watching the opportunity, when she thought that she had obtained the convenient moment, and that no eye could see her, seized on the lovely youth, and instantly demanded the gratification of her lust. We almost tremble for the consequence: but the issue was most favourable. Joseph preserved his integrity, and, though severely tried, acquired a glorious victory. He determined to renounce his honourable post in the family, his reputation, his liberty, his life, rather than give up his conscience, and provoke his God. "He therefore left his garment in her hand, and fled and got him out."

We pause a while to contemplate this singular example. To many, it is expected, the conduct of Joseph will appear mean and ridiculous. There are those, who presumptuously laugh at all religious scruples, as the bugbears of weak minds. But their scorn be to themselves! While they plead for the innocence and lawfulness of the vilest gratification, as if every thing might be sacrificed to their lusts, we will admire the grace of God, which could enable Joseph to maintain his steadfastness in such difficult circumstances, entirely from a sense of duty. If we consider "what is in man," and remember that Joseph was of such an age, as is most liable to fall through the solicitation of sensual desires; if we attend to the frequency and vehemence, with which the proposal was urged; and reflect, that, humanly speaking, he had little reason to apprehend a discovery, that he might have promised himself many advantages from a compliance with his mistress, and had every thing to dread
from

from her displeasure, if her offers were rejected; we shall be constrained to acknowledge, that he possessed a firmness in religion, not commonly to be found even in excellent characters. Ah! how many have been seduced by temptations, trifling to this! But we bless God, who can preserve his children, under the greatest as well as the least dangers. We are instructed, however, that it will be necessary for us to be defended with good principles, that we may know what to answer, when we are solicited to sin. Unless the heart be established in the fear of God, we conceive that all other barriers will easily be thrown down, upon any violent attack. But those, who have learned to set God before their eyes, whatever profit or pleasure may be proposed by any forbidden indulgence, will be able to reply, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

It will not, we hope, be forgotten, that it is incumbent on the young as well as the old, to resist every enticement. We are aware of that spirit of licentiousness, which prevails in the present day, which ever pleads for the gratification of our sensual desires, be the consequences what they may, and encourages those especially, who are in the vigour of life and feel their passions strong, to believe that they have a right to follow the impulse of lust, and that the violence of temptation will be a sufficient excuse. But the scriptures teach us, that no age, no circumstances whatever will justify the commission of the least evil. Yet, if you dread the thought of being overcome in the spiritual conflict, it will, probably, be necessary for you,
not

not only to watch against every assault of your enemies, but, like Joseph, to be afraid of listening to any entreaties, and therefore to turn away your ears from the seducer, and to fly from the place of danger.

What, then, was the reward of his integrity? This base and shameless woman, who had been his tempter, became his accuser. Her lust was succeeded by rage; and therefore, to be avenged upon him, as well as to prevent the discovery of her own guilt, she charged him with an attempt to commit the very sin he had refused, and produced the garment he had left with her, as a proof of her assertions. Her story was credited; and, as from the very nature of the circumstances he could not disprove the charge, he was obliged to lie under the imputation of a most heinous offence, and, as a vile criminal, was thrown into prison by his incensed master.

This was a most afflictive dispensation indeed. We had begun to conceive hopes, that his troubles were ended. But now the prospect appears darker than ever; and we are ready to say, as his brethren did, "What will become of his dreams?" We will not dwell on the mere bodily pain he endured in this state of confinement, though we are told, that, for a time at least, he suffered extremely in this respect. "His feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron*." But more distressing than his chains were the unjust reproaches brought upon his character, and probably upon religion too on his account; and yet he had no way left to vindicate his own innocence. A situation

* Ps. cv. 18.

this, peculiarly grievous to an upright mind. But, perhaps, we are all too eager to wipe off the foul aspersions, which may be malevolently cast upon our good name. It requires much strength of faith, to wait till God himself shall plead our cause, and silence the accusations of our enemies. He will do it, if we “abide patiently upon him:” “He will make our righteousness as clear as the light, and our just dealing as the noon day.” Sooner or later he will shew, on which side truth lies; “and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth*.”

If we go down with Joseph into his dreary confinement, we shall find him, even there, supported and comforted; an object not so much of compassion, as of envy. Our happiness depends not on our outward situation: for the consolations of God can dispel the gloom of a prison. The very chief of the apostles and his beloved companion, Silas, were beaten with many stripes, thrust into a dungeon, and bound in the stocks; but “at midnight they were singing praises to God†.” Shall we not say with Elihu, “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble‡?” The sacred history is very particular in observing, that “the Lord was with Joseph,” though dismissed from his master’s service with disgrace, treated as a malefactor, loaded with chains, and, probably, expecting to die. Yet even then, “the Lord was with him,” in a peculiar manner; and we are almost ready to con-

* Psa. xxxvii. 6, 7. Isa. xlv. 8.

† Acts xvi. 25.

‡ Job. xxxiv. 29.

clude, these were Joseph's best days. He maintained the same upright character, no doubt, when afterwards he was advanced to great power; but it is not so expressly remarked, that he enjoyed the divine presence in that exalted situation. This thought, surely, is enough to reconcile us to the heaviest trials.

Years before
Christ, 1720.

After some time the distresses of his confinement were alleviated, and, through an immediate influence from above, the mind of the gaoler was so much inclined to favour him, that Joseph was more like the keeper of the prison, than a common malefactor under close custody.—How wonderful is the government of God! He raises up friends for his own people, even in the midst of their most cruel enemies, and often constrains men of fiercest dispositions to shew a singular kindness towards them. He does it in the course of his providence, every day; and to Him the praise is due, that his faithful servants meet with any regard, or enjoy any external comfort or security, in such a world as this is.

To the grace of God, also, we are taught to ascribe the wisdom, integrity, and meekness of spirit, which were so evident in Joseph, as to gain him respect and support, where he had least reason to expect it. He appears to have been, in a remarkable manner, fitted for each place, to which he was appointed. What do we observe in him, when all the concerns of the prison were left to his care, but the utmost fidelity and diligence? We do not perceive any anxiety to vindicate his own character, nor any complaints of the base treatment he had received from his mistress, nor any

attempts to recover his liberty, when it would have been easy for him to have done it. We admire that humility, with which he submitted to oppression, and that faith, by which he intrusted his cause with God, and waited patiently for the time of deliverance. We learn to apply to the same inexhaustible source of all grace, that we also may be prepared for every change of situation, and endued with all necessary gifts, for the honourable discharge of our trust, and for our perseverance in every holy practice and disposition.

Years before
Christ, 1718.

In this state Joseph continued for some years, hoping, no doubt, that he should yet be released from his confinement, and, probably, having respect to the divine intimation, he had received in early life, that he should be raised to a most elevated rank. At length an opportunity offered, which seemed, for a while at least, to give him a prospect of better times. Two of the King's servants, the chief butler and the chief baker, who had offended their lord, were cast into prison, and committed to the care of Joseph*. In the same night, these two persons dreamed each of them a dream, prophetic of their approaching sentence, which Joseph interpreted, declaring that in three days the former should be restored to his honourable place, and the latter doomed to an ignominious death. This was a suitable occasion for Joseph to bespeak the kind offices of the chief butler, whose reconciliation with the King he had foretold. But, while we hear Joseph representing his case, and soliciting that justice might be done him, we are struck with

* Gen. xl. 1, &c.

his moderation and composure, and are hereby taught to suffer with a meek and quiet spirit. So far from dwelling on the injuries he had sustained, he did not once name his brethren or his mistress. "Think on me, (said he) when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me; and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

The chief butler regained his post, but, with the basest ingratitude, he forgot poor Joseph's request. Ah! how deceitful is human friendship! "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help*." The expectations, which Joseph probably had formed from that quarter, failed him. This was not the appointed season or way of deliverance, though the circumstance, here related, in the end led to his advancement. The divine wisdom saw it expedient, that his faith should be further tried; and that he should remain in prison "two full years longer." In that interval, no doubt, he had a feeling conviction, that "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord†." — Thus it pleases God to defeat our purposes, and to break our plans, that we may maintain a more firm and simple dependence upon Him. He will make us willing to leave the disposal of ourselves, and of our All to him, and to submit to his determination the time, as well as the means, of fulfilling his own promises.

* Psal. cxlvi. 3.

† iii. 8.

A different scene will soon open upon us, and we shall view this poor neglected prisoner exalted to a state of the highest worldly grandeur. But for the present, let us learn,

1. That many of God's dearest children may be the greatest sufferers. Neither is outward prosperity any mark of the Lord's favour, nor are the severest trials any token of his displeasure. We have beheld Joseph, a pious, amiable youth, of irreproachable manners, hated by his brethren,—through their cruelty, banished from his father's house,—sold as a slave in a foreign land,—dismissed from his master's service with disgrace, loaded with chains as a vile malefactor,—nor restored to his liberty, till thirteen tedious years had elapsed, from the time that he left his native country. In such a situation, who would not have concluded, "The Lord hath forsaken or forgotten me?" Unbelief would have suggested to us, "I have cleansed my heart in vain." But it has appeared, that Joseph was the object of God's constant and peculiar care; that he received from him singular proofs of his kindness; and that, by these very afflictive dispensations, he was prepared for future greatness, and even his promised exaltation brought about. Shall we say, that this was an uncommon case? Is it not, rather, the usual method of the divine providence? We remember it is written, "That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*," and that "our affliction," (heavy and long as it may seem) "is light and but for a moment, and worketh for us a far

* Acts xiv. 22.

more exceeding and eternal weight of glory *." We perceive also,

2. That the judgments of God, which are all ordered in wisdom, and are, like Himself, "holy, just, and good," are yet very mysterious to us. We see but very little of the designs of his government, and that little, darkly. We must wait till the consummation of all things, in order to form any consistent opinion: and then how amazing will the plan appear, when the whole shall be laid before us!

In the case of Joseph, it has pleased God to discover his own purpose, and the very remarkable steps, by which that purpose was effected. His aim, from the beginning, was to exalt Joseph; and this would have been easy for Him in a thousand ways. But he chooses, for the display of his own glory, to make the very opposition of his enemies the means of accomplishing his will; and thus he proves, that "there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord †."

We are hereby also instructed, that matters of the highest importance both to ourselves and to all the world may take their rise from circumstances, which at the first appear of the smallest moment. What a chain of events do we behold in this history, wonderfully connected together, and necessarily depending one upon another, and leading to an issue of the greatest magnitude! Had not Joseph dreamed;—had he not imprudently told his dreams;—had he not visited his brethren;—had not Reuben and Judah given the advice they did;—had not the Ishmaelites passed by at the

* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

† Prov. xxi. 30.

very time,—bought him,—and carried him into Egypt;—had he not been sold to Potiphar,—tempted by his mistress,—cast into prison;—had not the prisoners, and Pharaoh also, dreamed,—Joseph would not have attained to his very high exaltation. These preceding dispensations, at least, were the appointed means of raising him to the government of a very powerful nation,—of preserving that whole country, and many others likewise, from perishing by famine,—of supporting the family of Jacob in particular,—and of thus continuing the line, from which it was decreed that the Saviour of the world should come,—and, therefore, of accomplishing the Redemption of mankind. On such apparently trifling and casual circumstances may our comfort and safety, our life and our salvation itself depend. O let us trust and praise the Lord God of Israel, “who only doeth wondrous things,” and to him let us cheerfully commit the keeping of our souls, beseeching him, that all events may tend to bring us nearer to himself, and prepare us for his own everlasting kingdom!

J O S E P H.

SECT. 2.

Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dreams—made governor of Egypt—married—furnished corn out of his stores—received his brethren—discovered himself to them—sent for his father—supplied the Egyptians with corn—visited his sick father—buried him—comforted his brethren—prospered—died in faith.

AMIDST all the various dispensations of God, both in his providence and grace, we have observed that this is the invariable rule of his conduct, "Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*." Perhaps we may advance a step farther, and say, that those, whom he designs to exalt to highest honour, and to employ in the most eminent services, he first proves and qualifies by some singular and very severe afflictions. We have seen one of the most excellent characters, for a long time harassed with calamities of a complicated nature; and we are taught, that, during all those years of trial, he was not only intended for a prosperous and elevated condition, but in a state of preparation for it. In due season he obtained deliverance from his bondage; and in him was that gracious promise fulfilled, "He shall call upon me, and I

* Heb. xii. 6.

will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him*.”

Years before
Christ, 1715. Joseph, while a prisoner in Egypt, was neglected by the person, from whom, it should seem, he had formed some expectations of assistance. But, though the chief butler forgot Joseph, the God of heaven looked upon him with regard, and, in a surprising way, effected the grand purpose of his exaltation. The mind of Pharaoh was much disturbed by a dream, which all the wise men in his kingdom were unable to explain†. On this occasion, the chief butler remembered his ingratitude, and recommended Joseph to the King's notice, for the skill he had discovered in the interpretation of dreams. The poor Hebrew, therefore, was sent* for, in great haste, from the place of his confinement, and, after changing his prison garments, he stood in the presence of Pharaoh. We might ask, considering the nature of his education, Was there any thing so remarkable in his understanding or abilities, as to engage the attention of the Court? But we observe, that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” He determined, therefore, to shew the folly of the magicians of Egypt, and the vanity of their pretences, and at the same time, by means of this simple youth, to make known himself as the God of providence, who foresees and appoints every event. Let us learn to ascribe glory to Him.

With what humility, and yet with what firmness and dignity, did Joseph appear before the King! He

* Psal. xci. 15. † Gen. xli. 1, &c.

fought not favour by mean flattery or submission, nor was he ashamed to confess, that he was the servant of the living God, and that he depended upon Him for direction in this matter. When it was intimated, that he could understand a dream to interpret it, he replied, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." May the same mind be in all those, who are endued with any eminent gifts! Instead of arrogantly taking any praise to themselves, may they ever remember, that "a man can receive nothing except it be given him from heaven *," and say therefore, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory †!"

The dream was related by the prince, and immediately interpreted by Joseph, who declared that God had thus shewed to Pharaoh what he was about to do. Under two different emblems, by the appearance of seven fat and seven lean kine, as also by the like number of good and bad ears of corn, the king had been warned in his sleep, that seven years of remarkable plenty would be succeeded by an equal period of most grievous famine. It was, therefore, recommended to him, to appoint a governor over his kingdom, who should provide for the approaching scarcity, by laying up stores in the preceding seasons of great fruitfulness. The counsel was approved; and it was confessed that such wisdom, as Joseph had discovered, was truly wonderful, and could be given him only by the Spirit of the living God. Pharaoh, then, determined that the very man, who, by the divine inspiration,

* John iii. 27. † Psal. cxv. 1.

had suggested the advice, should be fixed upon to carry it into execution; and, for this purpose, Joseph was immediately invested with the highest dignity in the state, and with an unlimited power to transact all the affairs of the government; "to bind even princes at his pleasure, and to teach the senators wisdom*." "See," said Pharaoh, "I have set thee over all the land of Egypt: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou."

The conduct of Pharaoh may be proposed as an example to christian kings. Let them learn from an heathen ruler, that it is the soundest policy to promote such persons to honour, as are zealous for God and appear to be endued with his Spirit. If "righteousness exalteth a nation," the public welfare will be most secure under the management of those, who, being devoted to the fear of God, will exert themselves for the support and advancement of true religion, and thus bring down the divine blessing upon the people.

If now we advert to Joseph, we shall behold him with all the ensigns of royalty itself, adorned with Pharaoh's ring, with fine raiment, and a gold chain, expressive of dignity, and riding in his chariot of state, while they cried before him, "Bow the knee."—What a change is here! and how suddenly effected! We are constrained to acknowledge, "This was the Lord's doing." To Him we must ascribe the dream, as well as the interpretation, which was the cause of this exaltation. How great is His power, who can

* Psal. cv. 22.

turn the hearts of all men, whithersoever he pleaseth ! How firm his promise ; how unchangeable his love towards those, who fear him ! “ He raiseth the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dung-hill : that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people *.”—Are we not hereby encouraged to maintain our dependence upon God, even in the lowest condition, and especially under unjust reproaches ? “ Commit thy way unto the Lord ; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.” We allow, then, the justice and propriety of an Apocryphal comment upon the whole of this history. The divine wisdom, “ when the righteous was sold, forsook him not, but delivered him from sin : She went down with him into the pit, and left him not in bonds, till she brought him the sceptre of the kingdom, and power against those that oppressed him : as for them that had accused him, she shewed them to be liars, and gave him perpetual glory †.”

Do we think it strange, that Joseph’s cause was so long delayed, and that he was exposed, for so many years, to the most injurious treatment and the foulest aspersions ? It should be remembered, that the Lord is not accountable to us, whatever we, or any of his people, may suffer : “ Let Him do, what seemeth him good.” But we know our heaviest afflictions proceed from his love. For as “ gold is tried in the fire, so are acceptable men in the furnace of adversity,” and they must pass through one furnace after another,

* Psal. cxiii. 7, 8.

† Wisd. x. 13, 14.

till their corruptions be purged away. There is a necessity, therefore, for the trials even of the most eminent saints, on account of the depravity still remaining in them. It is probable, that Joseph's advancement might have been fatal to him, had he not been previously prepared for it by a long course of suffering. "We should have looked upon him with concern (says an admired writer) had we seen him in bonds, and known his innocence. But God, who had a far more indulgent and tender compassion for him, left him in a condition, from which we should have delivered him*."

More pleasing to Joseph, doubtless, than all the honours of his new situation, was the prospect of extensive usefulness, which it afforded him. We turn our attention, therefore, to his conduct in this high department, and consider of what kind was his administration of the government. Did he give into the sensual excesses of the Court, or make his great preferment the means of procuring his own indulgence? No; we find him immediately and constantly mindful of the important business, to which he was not only appointed by Pharaoh, but called by God himself. The duties of private life, also, had a share in his regard; for, having married a person of distinguished rank, he was blessed with a family. To his two children he affixed significant names, expressive of his gratitude for what God had done for him.

But neither did his domestic comforts engage his chief concern: the trust reposed in him by the king,

* See this history beautifully illustrated in Rollin's *Bell. Lett.* Vol. III.

and the urgent necessities of the people, demanded and engrossed his continual attention. With an uncommon diligence, and with the most disinterested fidelity, he went throughout all the land of Egypt, preparing store-houses in every city, and depositing therein the vast increase of corn during the time of plenty. At length the famine came, according to the prediction, and the utmost distress pervaded the whole kingdom and all the neighbouring countries. "Go to Joseph,"—was the command of Pharaoh to all those, who cried to him for relief: and by the provident care of Joseph, and his tender regard to their wants, their lives were preserved.—What a pattern does this wise governor exhibit, to those who stand in the highest situation! They are appointed to their place for the benefit of others, and, as stewards, are accountable for their conduct. Let them be willing, therefore, to forego their own profit and indulgence, that they may render themselves of real use in the world.

Years before
Christ, 1707.

The dearth, we have seen, was most extensive: its grievous effects were felt far and wide. But, upon this occasion, the holy scriptures call our attention chiefly to one small family, the house of Joseph's father, the posterity of Abraham, from which the promised Saviour was to descend. The concerns of that little circle were of more consequence in God's estimation, than those of all the nations on the earth beside. A very minute and most interesting account, therefore, is given us of their circumstances: and here, the plan of this very remarkable history is more clearly unfolded to us.

Jacob

when under the pressure of some grievous calamity, they shall stand arraigned at its bar, be constrained to feel and acknowledge the justice of its charge, and be filled with confusion and dismay for those very sins, which they had seemed to have forgotten, or made light of. Especially, where there has been a religious education, as in the case before us, past instructions and admonitions, which might appear for a long season to be utterly lost, will be recollected, and produce the strongest impressions of terror upon the mind.

This was a most affecting scene; more than the heart of Joseph, with all his apparent severity, could bear. He was obliged to withdraw from them, to give vent to his tears, that he might not betray his real character. "He turned himself about from them and wept." But as his design was not yet answered, he resumed his former austerity, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before their eyes, requiring him to be detained as a pledge for their return. They were, however, dismissed with great kindness: their asses were laden with corn: they were furnished with provisions for their journey; and their money was privately restored.

But are they suffered to depart without an explanation of the very strange reception they had met with? Is no tender message sent from Joseph to his aged father? And must the heart of the good old man be still more deeply wounded by the loss of Simeon, and the demand made for Benjamin?—We apprehend, that, in the whole of this very singular deportment, Joseph was actuated by the purest affection towards
them

them all. He wished to be assured of the repentance of those, who had conspired against him; and his trial of them had, in part, answered the purpose, as it produced from them a confession of their guilt. He was also desirous to see his venerable parent and his beloved brother Benjamin. But he could not desert his situation: and if, at the first, he had discovered the whole of his history, in order to have invited them, the end might have been defeated. His brethren, to hide their own sin, would, probably, have concealed the matter from Jacob, and visited Egypt no more. To ensure their return, therefore, and gradually to prepare the way for the transplanting of all their respective families, Simeon was detained, and Benjamin required.

We forbear to repeat the distress of Jacob, and the very great reluctance, with which he permitted Benjamin to leave him, when compelled the second time by the famine to send his sons into Egypt*. Suffice it to say, that Joseph received them with the utmost kindness and affection. With the warmest expressions of regard, he enquired after their welfare and that of their dear father; and when he had fixed his eyes upon his younger brother Benjamin, his heart was overwhelmed with the strongest emotions of love and joy; "and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there." After giving vent to his tender feelings, he appeared again before them, with all the dignity of the lord of Egypt; and yet, to their utter astonishment, he admitted them to sit down at a familiar entertainment with himself. While they

* Gen. xliii. 1, &c.

were eating and drinking in his presence, he shewed respect to them all, but paid a particular attention to Benjamin.

Did he, then, upon that occasion make known himself to them? No; he determined, by another device, to gain further proofs of their repentance, and of their dutiful regard to their father. When they were ready to depart, he commanded the steward of his house, not only to supply them plentifully with corn, and to put every man's money in his sack's mouth, but also to hide his own silver cup in Benjamin's sack*. It is obvious, what his intention was: he was thereby furnished with a pretence for ~~delaying~~ delaying them; and, while Benjamin seemed to be convicted of dishonesty, and to have forfeited his liberty, if not his life, they were all reduced to the deepest distress: and thus an opportunity was given, more clearly to discover the true state of their minds. Then Joseph perceived, what he had earnestly wished for, that their former barbarity of spirit was subdued, that they were stung with the keenest remorse for their cruelty towards him, "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," and, as dutiful children, most tenderly concerned for their father's comfort.

This was enough: No further trial was necessary; nor could Joseph any longer bear to put a violence upon himself. While they stood trembling before him he commanded his attendants to withdraw, and then, suddenly bursting into tears, declared his real character†. He cried aloud "I am Joseph;" and instantly, with

* Gen. xliv. 1, &c. † xlv. 1, &c.

affectionate

affectionate remembrance of his absent parent, he asked, "Doth my father yet live?"—A discovery, so unexpected, and which brought to their recollection their past guilt, filled them with surprise, and terror, and confusion. "They could not answer him, for they were troubled at his presence." But to relieve himself and them, he called them near to him; and, while he repeated, "I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt," he assured them of his complete forgiveness, and directed their attention to the overruling providence of God, which had made use of their cruelty for the most gracious purposes, not only to exalt him to the highest dignity, but to save the lives of thousands, and to preserve their posterity in particular, by a great deliverance.

The wonderful tidings he had thus published to them, he was anxious to send to his venerable father in Canaan; and, being apprized of the continuance of the famine for five years longer, he was eager to transplant both him and all the different families of his brethren into Egypt, that he might rescue them from want, and provide them with a place of security and comfort near to himself. He desired them, therefore, to hasten back again with the tenderest assurances of his love to their common parent, and with the most earnest request, that he would instantly remove all his household. But the affecting interview was not yet concluded. He could not conceal his partiality to Benjamin, his own mother's son, who accordingly received the first, perhaps the warmest, expressions of his regard. But his heart glowed with fervent affection to

them all: "he kissed all his brethren, and wept over them;" and then their fears were so far dispersed, that they were encouraged to talk with him.

Every circumstance in this story is most interesting and instructive. Without attending to the horror, which the recollection of their guilt excited in the minds of his brethren, what opinion shall we form of the conduct of Joseph? Upon a review of the whole, will any objection lie against him for his seeming severity? Will it be said, that he was haughty and revengeful? On the contrary, may he not be proposed as an admirable pattern of meekness, long-suffering, and forgiveness? The injuries, he had received, were unprovoked and almost unparalleled: and, had he been disposed to revenge himself, he was furnished with the most convenient opportunities. But, instead of returning evil for evil, he took pains to comfort those who had conspired against his life, upbraided them not with what they had done, and, with a parental tenderness, provided for their support. He will teach us, therefore, "to suffer long, and to be kind."

Preparations were then made for their departure. The King of Egypt, also, as well as his Vicegerent, invited them to come and fix their abode in the richest part of his dominions; and they were dismissed, with provisions for the way, with large presents for themselves and their father, and with conveyances for the removal of all their families.—One thing, perhaps, may surprise us. The last words of Joseph to his brethren, upon his taking leave of them, were a solemn caution, which may seem to imply a reproof: "See that ye fall

not out by the way." But, doubtless, he saw sufficient reason for suggesting this admonition, not only from their former dispositions, but also from the circumstances which had occurred. It was seasonable and most brotherly advice; that, being reconciled to him, they should not quarrel with each other, but abstain from mutual upbraidings, and not cast any reflections, which might embitter their spirit.—We should remember, that the same counsel is at all times necessary, even to those who are the children of the same heavenly Father. For alas! they also are disposed to reproach one another, and to "fall out by the way."

We omit the particulars of the journey, wherein the aged Patriarch, and his numerous progeny around him, were conducted from the promised land of Canaan to a foreign country *. But we cannot overlook the tenderness and filial affection of Joseph, who, upon hearing of Jacob's approach, hastened to meet him, and, with expressions of reverence, love, and joy, to bid him welcome into Egypt. How amiable did this Governor of a most powerful nation appear! Not forgetting himself amidst the splendors of a court, nor ashamed to avow his former low connections in life, he bowed before the hoary shepherd, and fell upon his neck, and wept with many tears. Nor was this an empty profession, made in secret only. He seemed eager to bring both his father and his brethren into public notice, though their situation was mean, and their occupation odious, in the estimation of the Egyptians. He introduced them to the King himself,

* Gen. xlv. 1, &c.

whose kindness towards them was very remarkable*. By his appointment they were put in possession of a most fertile part of the kingdom; and there they were protected and nourished under the care of Joseph.

Thus we behold him strictly attentive to his duty, both as a son and a brother; and more honourable to him than his fine vestures, or his chariot of state, was his condescending and most affectionate regard to those relations, who were then so much below him. Herein was true greatness of mind displayed; seldom, alas! to be found in those, who are suddenly raised to an elevated rank. In general, we observe them proud and oppressive; shy of their former connections, and unwilling to have it known, from what original they sprang; as if mere outward ornaments conferred a real dignity. How false an estimate! Let the example of Joseph teach us (and religion will ever demand it of us), to attend to the various calls of the different offices we sustain, and the places in which we stand. This will be the brightest glory, to which we can attain; which will add a lustre to the lowest individual, no less than to the highest minister of state.

The family of Jacob, then, was settled in Egypt, which, strange as it may seem, in more instances than the present, proved a nursing mother to the Church. This we perceive to have been effected by the immediate influence and interposition of God, and to have been the grand design of his providence in all the preceding history. But, while Joseph was affectionately

* Gen. xlvii. 1, &c.

mindful of his father's house, was he inattentive to the necessities of the Egyptians? No; they were reduced, indeed, to the utmost distress; but, through his unwearied exertions, they were preserved from perishing by the famine, and made to acknowledge, that they owed their very lives to him. He has been accused of cruelty and injustice towards them: but, upon a serious review, we approve his conduct in the very difficult part which he had to act. He stood between Pharaoh and the people, and was bound to consult the honour and interest of the Sovereign, no less than the support and welfare of the subjects. It is observable, however, that, though there were such different demands upon him, he acquitted himself with astonishing wisdom and integrity. They cried to him in their extremity, "Give us bread, for why should we die in thy presence?" And while he sold unto them for the supply of their wants, their money, their cattle, their lands, and even their liberty were all alienated to the King. Thus Joseph, as a steward, was faithful to his trust; but he promoted not the purposes of arbitrary power. The possessions of the people, therefore, were restored to them, a fifth only being reserved for Pharaoh.—We pause, and admire, not merely the prudence of Joseph, but that grace which enabled him to discharge, with fidelity, the duties of the Prime Minister of a large and powerful nation, no less than those of a servant and a gaoler; and we are hereby encouraged to expect from our God all necessary assistance for the various offices of life.

Years before
Christ, 1689.

In pursuing the history of Joseph, we still perceive in him, even to the end, the dutiful son and affectionate brother, as well as the wise statesman. For seventeen years he enjoyed the pleasing and instructive society of his pious father Jacob, but at length he was called to the very painful task of standing by his dying bed, and taking his last leave of him. When he heard of Jacob's sickness, eager to testify all filial reverence and love, he hastened to visit him, accompanied by his two children Manasseh and Ephraim, that they also might behold the faith and hope of a departing saint, and profit by his prayers and admonitions at that solemn season*. It was distressing, doubtless, to lose so valuable a parent; but in the good man's dissolution such evident proofs appeared of his fervent piety and unshaken confidence in God, as must have afforded the most useful lesson, and administered the strongest consolation to his weeping family around him. Joseph, in particular, was reminded of the singular dispensations of Providence, by which the Patriarch had been conducted and preserved, and of the divine promises also made to him and to his seed. He heard him, in the views of death, declare his firm expectation, that it would be as God had said; and, while he presented his two sons before him, he was witness to the earnest petitions put up to God for them, and to the benediction solemnly pronounced upon them; though, contrary to his own desire, the younger was preferred before the elder.

* Gen. xlviii. 1, &c.

What scenes so profitable as the dying beds of believers, who can maintain their hope in God even to the last! Do they admire and praise the grace and mercy which they have experienced, encourage their friends to adhere steadfastly to God, and, with an eloquence and fervour of which others are incapable, express their confidence in the Covenant? What, then, do we learn from their testimony? Do we not, on such occasions, feel the reality and excellence of religion? Do we not confess the vanity of the world in its best enjoyments, and spurn at all its offers, while we are constrained to say, "Let me die the death of the righteous?" More useful, to Joseph, surely, must have been this visit to his father, than all the pageantry of Pharaoh's court.

Jacob, we have seen, before he expired, with great solemnity and by the spirit of prophecy blessed all his children*. But peculiar notice was taken of Joseph, and it was obvious, even then, that he was the favourite. For, when the old man came to speak of this darling son, he seemed to dwell with delight upon his name. Yet we own, these were the words, not so much of the fond parent, as of the inspired prophet. "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob: from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel: Even by the God of thy father, who shall

* Gen. xlix. 1, &c.

help thee, and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of thy progenitors, unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.”—We need not add a comment. The history of Joseph is here briefly related, and the future condition of his posterity predicted. The support he had received under his unparalleled trials was most devoutly ascribed to the divine favour; and it was also declared to be the purpose of Heaven, to crown his family with blessings of every kind, blessings most eminent and most durable.—It will become us likewise to remember, that the Lord alone makes the distinctions we perceive in the various circumstances of men., “He putteth down one, and setteth up another*.” In every prosperous situation, then, let not our hearts be exalted, but let his name be glorified. For “who maketh thee to differ?”

The pious son stood, with unremitting attention, by his departing father; and, in testimony of his unvaried affection, “he fell upon his face, and wept upon him, and kissed him†.” Nor did his filial regard cease here. He had received a charge to remove the dead body to Canaan, to be interred in the sepulchre of Abraham. He, therefore, caused it to be embalmed after the manner of the Egyptians; which might be rendered necessary by the length of the intended jour-

* Psa. lxxv. 7.

† Gen. l. 1, &c.

ney, and was also a mark of respect due to the remains of him, who was so nearly related to the Governor and Saviour of that country. Joseph himself went with the relicts of his dear parent to Canaan, accompanied in the funeral procession with all the retinue suited to his high rank, as Prime Minister of Pharaoh.

Does not the character before us excite the esteem and admiration of every reader? The amiable meekness of his spirit was conspicuous on almost every occasion. But in no instance does he appear more lovely than when discharging the duties of an affectionate son and dutiful child, though elevated to the chief honours of Egypt. Have we not observed him rejoicing to hear of his father, when separated from him; most anxious to promote his welfare; avowing his relation to him before Pharaoh's court; and continually attentive to his comfort, even to the latest moment? This was true dignity indeed.

And upon whom is not the command binding, "Honour thy father and thy mother?" The observance of this precept is peculiarly pleasing to God, and has generally, in the present life, "great recompence of reward." Reason, as well as religion, enjoins it. For, how much do we owe our parents! It will be impossible, by any acts of kindness, to repay them for the expence, and toil, and anxiety, they have had on our account. Is this properly considered? May we not lament the perverseness and cruel obstinacy of children, and even their want of natural affection? How many aged persons are grievously afflicted by the unkindness of their own offspring! When they stand in
most

most need of relief and comfort, are they not utterly neglected and despised by those, whom, for many years, they have tenderly watched over, and, with inexpressible distress to themselves, laboured to support and to advance in the world. Shall any excuses be allowed? No difference of rank, no age in life, no superiority of abilities will exempt us from the duty; and, most assuredly, a contemptuous disregard of it will bring down the curse of God upon our families.

While Joseph was mourning for his father, he found an additional cause of sorrow, in a message he received from his brethren. Their common parent was now removed, whom they had considered as their bulwark of defence. They thought that Joseph might have abstained from revenge through his affectionate regard for Jacob; but they began to fear that, all restraint of this kind being taken away, they should fall under his heaviest displeasure. They sent, therefore, in the most supplicating terms to crave forgiveness for their sin, enforcing their petition with the sacred names of his father and of his father's God.—Ah! how suspicious is guilt! How miserable, how abject the sinner, under the reproaches of an awakened conscience! The wicked are indeed ready to “flee, when no man pursueth.” Was such a request necessary? Had there been any malicious resentment cherished in Joseph's heart? Far otherwise. Their very jealousy, therefore, and their entreaty gave him much pain, and called forth many tears.

Not yet satisfied, they came to him; and, what they had at first scorned to do, and afterwards had done unwittingly,

unwittingly, now they did voluntarily; they fell down, with lowliest prostration, before him, and said, "Behold, we be thy servants!"—Let the generous man, who has never had any other designs than those of kindness, even to his enemies, judge of the distress of Joseph upon this occasion. But this very circumstance affords another proof of the greatness of his mind, in that complete forgiveness and benevolence towards his brethren, which marked his character throughout.

While they were trembling at his feet, he raised them up and comforted them with assurances of his love. He was affected, he was grieved by their submission, and their crying to him for mercy; and therefore he referred them to God, who alone had a right to take cognizance of their conduct: "Am I (said he) in the place of God?"—We should forget ourselves, and invade the office of God, if we should presume to avenge ourselves: and we are grossly ignorant of the nature and evil of sin, if we are content with asking pardon of our fellow sinners, and do not make supplication to our Judge. It is the prerogative of the Lord God Almighty to punish, and He only can forgive our iniquity.

That they might not "be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow," he piously observed to them, that God had over-ruled their treatment of him for wise and merciful purposes, which called for their warmest gratitude: "As for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."—This consideration may serve as a clew to us, to unravel some very mysterious dispensations. We are taught by Joseph to look beyond
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all secondary causes of our trouble, and even beyond the wickedness of men and devils, to the gracious and holy designs of God, and to the influence of His providence, who worketh and none can let. "He sitteth upon the throne;" and whatever commotions are raised, while he seems to be disappointed of his aim, he is really performing all his pleasure. He suffers sinners to shew the exceeding depravity of their hearts, and their rooted enmity against him and his people: but, like the waves of the sea, which rage horribly, though they toss themselves, yet they can not prevail. They are inexcusable for their bad intentions; but he brings good out of evil, and causes their very sins to minister to the ends of his government, and the promotion of his glory.

How many benefits were derived, in the case before us, from the base conduct of Jacob's sons,—to Joseph himself—to his father—to his brethren—and to the Egyptians! The God of Israel was hereby made known among many nations, and the line was preserved, from which the promised Saviour was to come. "God meant it unto good;" and in this view, it should seem, Joseph acquiesced and was thankful. Such a conviction of the holy sovereignty of God will keep us from fretfulness and impatience, and inspire us with the firmest confidence, even while we are suffering by the violence of ungodly men. We confess that "his way is in the deep;" and we ought never to forget, that though he permit our wickedness, and will get honour by it, we must lie in the dust before him,
and

and say, "To us belongeth shame and confusion of face!"

But, since God bears with our perverseness, we also should bear with one another. We have already seen, in Joseph's character, some striking instances of patience and forbearance; and now again at the last, the same sweetness of temper is displayed. His brethren were in dreadful apprehension, that he would exert his power to crush and to destroy them. "No;" said he, "fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them." This is a lesson of most important instruction. Here we behold an example of that charity, which "seeketh not her own, and is not easily provoked." Is the same mind also in us? Do we possess this peculiar mark of true Christians? Do we not only love one another, but can we "bless them that hate us?" Are we "overcome with evil," or do we "overcome evil with good?" Ah! what unchristian tempers do we witness in those, who call themselves the disciples of Christ! What strife and contention! What bitterness and evil speaking! What a readiness to take fire at every supposed insult! What pride, implacability, and resentment! But let us not vainly flatter ourselves, that we know any thing of true religion, unless we have "crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

Years before
Christ, 1635.

The sequel of Joseph's history is comprized in a few sentences. Though he lived from the death of Jacob, the space of fifty-four years, we are told only, that he continued to enjoy much

much prosperity in Egypt, and saw his father's house, and his own descendants, multiply around him. At length the period arrived, when he must lay down his honour in the dust. But, in the prospect of his approaching dissolution, his heart was cheered with "a hope full of immortality." Firmly depending on the promise of God, he looked forwards to the deliverance of the Church, not merely from Egypt, but from the bondage of sin and Satan through the Redemption of the Saviour. In token of this expectation, he gave a solemn charge to his brethren in his last moments, to preserve his dead body, and carry his bones into Canaan, assuring them that God would in due time conduct them thither. Accordingly we read, that, in all the journeyings of the Israelites through the wilderness, the bones of this honoured Patriarch were considered as a sacred deposit, which they carefully conveyed with them, and as a constant intimation that the Covenant of God would stand fast with them. Not, therefore, to a vain foolish desire of settling the place of his burial, for his own glory, but to his lively hope we are to ascribe his dying request; according to the comment of an inspired writer: "BY FAITH Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones*."

Thus, then, the death, as well as the life, of this eminent saint was truly excellent; and we are furnished hereby with strong encouragement to persevere in the service of God. How happy to set out early in the

* Heb. xi. 22.

heavenly race, to continue steadfastly, and to finish the course with joy! This did Joseph: this may we also do! Let us look to the end; and, while we have regard to the faithfulness of God, like Joseph we may rejoice and triumph in the stability of the Covenant. Even then, when the pains of dissolution are upon us, if we have trusted in Him, on whom the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles depended, we need not fear to say, "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

JOSEPH

A TYPE OF CHRIST.

SECT. III.

Joseph may be considered as typifying Christ, in his sufferings—his advancement—and the benefits of his government.

THE events, which are recorded in the life of Joseph, are so very remarkable, that they must necessarily engage the attention, and interest the feelings of every reader. They cannot fail to please, astonish, and instruct, if considered only as a common history. But it may be useful, before we drop the subject, to take another view of this eminent Patriarch, not now as an example of righteousness, but as a figure of that more illustrious Personage, the Seed of Jacob, who was raised up for infinitely greater services, than he whom we have been contemplating. Upon a serious comparison of the two, we shall find a most striking resemblance between them, at least in many important circumstances.

The holy scriptures, clearly, abound with typical representations; in which some actions and characters were designed to exhibit an emblem of others. Particularly, the main outlines of the grand scheme of Redemption were pointed out, in many ways, from the beginning.

beginning. The offices, dignity, sufferings, and grace of the Saviour appeared in promises and prophecies, throughout the old testament, and were also described by types, or certain allusive pictures, in a variety of things, persons, and events. The dispensations of God to former ages afforded a likeness of what he intended to accomplish, "in the fulness of time," and has now brought to pass by his Son Jesus Christ. We shall, therefore, find some common histories containing a mystical reference to the Gospel, and, without any force, capable of an evangelical application. In many instances we are expressly directed to such a sense by the scriptures themselves. Thus Adam, Noah, Melchisedec, Isaac, Moses, Aaron, David, and others, were evidently "figures of Him that was to come."

Joseph, indeed, is not mentioned as a typical character by the writers of the new testament; and, it is granted, where they do not lead the way, we should be very cautious and reserved in drawing conclusions of this kind. There is great danger from indulging a lively imagination, which may readily discover a thousand resemblances, where none were ever meant. For, while we follow our own fancies, we may fall into the grossest absurdities, and expose, to the utmost contempt and ridicule, the very truths we wish to recommend. But there are so many points of agreement between Joseph and the Saviour, that the comparison must be allowed to be just, and such as naturally offers itself to us. It may also be a most profitable employment, and a proper improvement of the history we have been considering, to contemplate the Lord Jesus

as typified by the Jewish Patriarch. And in doing this, it will be acknowledged that we are justified by some venerable names, and are treading in the steps of several pious and judicious commentators. We refer only to one. "It is plain, (says a learned and admired author) that the design of God, in joining together so many singular circumstances in the life of Joseph, was to describe the principal lines in that of his Son. We should, therefore, know the history of Joseph only by halves, if we stopped at the bare surface, without informing ourselves of the hidden and mysterious sense, wherein the most essential part of it consists, as Jesus Christ is the end of the law and of all the scriptures*."

Omitting some minute particulars, we shall perceive the clearest proofs of an exact likeness, in considering their sufferings, their advancement, and the benefits of their government.

I. Their sufferings. Most uncommon and distressing were the afflictions of Joseph even from his earliest years. We need not repeat the tragical story: It will easily be remembered, that he was derided, hated, and persecuted by his brethren, because he testified of their evil conduct, and predicted his own glory;—that his kindness towards them was recompensed with the most cruel injuries;—that his life was aimed at, and that he was sold for a few pieces of silver;—that, through the basest accusation, he was condemned, without an advocate to plead his cause;—that he was treated as a vile malefactor, numbered with those who were ap-

* Rollin's Bell. Lett. vol. iii.

pointed to die, and for some years confined in a dungeon;—and yet, that, in the midst of all, he was meek and patient, and opened not his mouth in murmur or complaint. Do we not observe herein a striking picture of that condescending and gracious Redeemer, who, in the depth of his humiliation, was more afflicted than any man? This greater Son of Jacob endured trials the most severe, and of a nature similar to those we have now recounted. He could say with truth, “I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother’s children*: They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause.” They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love†.” For “he was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief‡.” “He came unto his own, and his own received him not§;” because he testified of them, that their works were evil||, and spake of his own exaltation at the right hand of God, demanding their unfeigned submission to himself¶. He came to them upon an errand of love; but “they would none of his counsel:” When they saw him, they said, “Come, let us kill him**.” They sought to apprehend him, but were restrained, by an immediate influence upon their minds, till his hour arrived ††. At length, he was betrayed for the vile consideration of thirty pieces of silver, and given up into the hands of strangers. Charges of the most atrocious kind, but

* Psal. lxi. 8.

† cix. 3, 5.

‡ Isa. liii. 3.

§ John i. 11.

|| vii. 7.

¶ Matt. xxvi. 64.

** Matt. xxi. 38.

†† John vii. 30, 44. viii. 29.

unjust and malicious, were brought against him; and he was condemned upon the evidence of false witnesses. For there were none to stand forth in his behalf, none to compassionate, or to do him justice. Thus he describes his own case: "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness; and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none*." Not to dwell on all the cruel insults put upon him, and the tortures which the rage of his adversaries invented for him, we cannot forget that "he was numbered with the transgressors." For while we accompany him to Calvary, we behold him in a situation the most ignominious we can imagine, between two thieves, "the one on his right hand, the other on his left†." But what do we hear from him? Do expressions of anger, resentment, or discontent break forth from his lips? He was silent under reproaches; he complained not of the iniquitous sentence, by which he was condemned. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth‡," except it were in prayer and blessing. He went down also "into the lower parts of the earth," and continued a prisoner of the grave till the third day, but there his humiliation ceased: "His soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption."

The bare relation of Joseph's sufferings must deeply affect every compassionate heart, and perhaps may excite many tears. But with what feelings do we receive the Gospel history, and behold Him, "who was holy, harmless, and undefiled," in circumstances infinitely

* Psal. lxi. 20.

† Mar. xv, 27, 28.

‡ Isa. liii. 7.

more painful? It were, indeed, of little moment to weep for the injurious treatment of the Saviour, just as we might do under an impression of pity for any innocent person in distress. A tenderness of this kind does not imply the exercise of any truly spiritual principles and tempers. We are here called "to look upon him whom we have pierced;" and therefore, while we mourn for Him, we are chiefly to consider our own evil desert, and the astonishing greatness of his love. He suffered, not merely as a virtuous man under oppression, but as a sacrifice for sin, offering up himself a propitiation for the most rebellious, even for those whom he might have made the monuments of his heaviest displeasure.

We turn from the contemplation of the cross and the grave of Jesus; and, upon a further view of the two persons we are comparing, we remark

II. Their advancement and glory. We have seen the Patriarch suddenly delivered from his prison, and raised to a situation of highest rank and distinguished honour. His most painful calamities paved the way for his exaltation. He was designed, indeed, by God himself for this elevated state, and was therefore invested with supreme power and dignity, according to the prophecies concerning him. He was set over the whole kingdom of Egypt, and had the absolute and uncontrolled disposal of all its affairs, being subject only to Pharaoh. The people confessed his authority, and bowed down before him, with all suitable reverence and obedience. Distant nations also came and paid their homage to him; and even his brethren, who had

maliciously opposed his advancement, were compelled to prostrate themselves at his feet.

But we behold one greater than Joseph. "We see Jesus," after his astonishing humiliation and in consequence of it, "crowned with glory and honour*." The grave was obliged to give up her dead; and He, who was one while "the very outcast of the people," a few days afterwards declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth†." The Lord said unto him, "Sit thou at my right hand‡." "He hath exalted him to be a Prince and a Saviour: Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church§." This also was effected according to "God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge," and for the completion of all the prophecies concerning him, which had been delivered from the beginning of the world. "Thus it behoved him to suffer, and through suffering to enter into his glory||." Much opposition had been made, in order to frustrate the divine purpose concerning him; but that very circumstance tended to promote it. "The kingdom, then, is the Lord's, and he is the Governor among the nations¶." In his human nature, indeed, he is subject to the Father; for though "all things are put under him, yet He is excepted, which did put

* Heb. ii. 9.

† Matt. xxviii. 18.

‡ Psal. cx. 1,

§ Acts v. 31. Eph. i. 21, 22.

|| Luke xxiv. 26, 46.

¶ Psal. xxii. 28.

all things under him*.” As God, he could not be capable of any advancement; but he sustains the office, of which we are now speaking, as Mediator. And, in this character, “He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him†.” For “God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father‡.” The very Jews themselves, his brethren according to the flesh (when the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in), shall submit themselves to him, and “He shall reign over the house of Jacob§.”

Do we, then, unfeignedly acknowledge his authority, and fulfil his commands? Are we willing, that this man should reign over us? It is not enough, that we admire his dignity, or pay him an external adoration. With expressions of homage in our lips, we may be disaffected to him in our hearts: and it is the reverence, and the obedience of the heart, which he chiefly demands. If, however, we are practising any hypocrisy and deceit in this matter, he will search it out, for he trieth the reins. And if we refuse to bow

* 1 Cor. xv. 27.

† Psal. lxxii. 8, 9, 11.

‡ Phil. ii. 9—11.

§ Luke i. 33. Rom. xi. 25, 26.

to his sceptre, he will make us feel the rod of his anger, and prove his right to the throne which he possesses, "by breaking his enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel*."

We pursue the resemblance in another particular, and consider

III. The benefits of their government. It has appeared to be a singular blessing to Egypt and to the surrounding nations, as well as to Jacob's family, that Joseph was exalted to that state of eminence, which he attained. Through his pridential care many lives were preserved from perishing by famine: and though his father's house were driven to great extremity, he was sent before them to provide an asylum for them. On this account, it should seem, that honourable name was given him, which has been interpreted "THE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD." All, who felt the distresses of want, were encouraged to seek relief from him. "GO TO JOSEPH" was the grand direction: nor was any application made in vain. Various kingdoms were supported from the stores which he had laid up; and even his own malicious brethren were, after a short trial, received to his favour, assured of forgiveness, supplied with every necessary, and put in possession of the country which he had prepared for them.

This, though a very remarkable, is but a faint representation of the advantages derived to a guilty world from the government of Jesus. For, what are all temporal blessings, compared to those which are spiritual and eternal? Let us behold "the man, who is

* Psal. ii. 9.

God's fellow," bestowing the inestimable benefits of "repentance and remission of sins." For "he hath ascended on high, he hath led captivity captive: he hath received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God may dwell among them*." "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy. His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed†." "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved‡." "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace§." "We are complete in him||:" For "He is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption¶." He is therefore called by a significant and most precious title, expressive of the great deliverance we obtain by him, JESUS, THE SAVIOUR, "Because he saves his people from their sins**." "He is able to save to the uttermost ††:" nor is he more able than he is willing. It is not enough to assert of him, that he will receive the application, and relieve the wants, of every poor, destitute, miserable creature, crying to him for help: but he invites, he commands, he entreats all those, who are ready to perish, to accept the blessings of his government. With the tenderest com-

* Psal. lxxviii. 18. † lxxii. 12, 13, 17. ‡ Acts iv. 12.

§ John i. 16. || Col. ii. 10. ¶ 1 Cor. i. 30.

** Matt. i. 21. †† Heb. vii. 25.

passion he says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God; and there is none else*." And thus again he publisheth his grace, "Come unto me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest†:" "And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out‡."

Thousands have experienced the truth of these declarations, and have been rescued from everlasting destruction by this mighty Deliverer. Many nations have paid their homage to him; and many more, we trust, will yet "take his yoke upon them," and "be blessed in him." The very Jews themselves, who gave him up into wicked hands, to be crucified and slain, shall obtain forgiveness through him. They shall turn to the Lord, and be saved. He will not then upbraid them for their former contempt of him; but he will speak kindly to them, admit them to a familiar intercourse, and appoint them a kingdom near to himself for ever.

But most gracious as the invitation of the Gospel is, it is despised and rejected, till men feel distress of conscience, and apprehend their danger. Then the relief provided is confessed to be most suitable; and every thing else, in comparison, sinks in value. The hungry soul best knows how to estimate the blessing of having bread to eat: and to an awakened sinner, who is in dread of impending destruction, the grace of Jesus will appear of highest worth, infinitely preferable to all that the world can offer. He, and he alone, will

* Isa. xlv. 22. † Matt. xi. 28. ‡ John vi. 37.

account it as "the pearl of great price,* and will sell all that he has, that he may buy it*.

May we not enquire, then, of all, to whom the message of the Gospel is sent, Do you understand the true state and condition of your souls? Have you a deep sense of your need of salvation, and a fear of being lost for ever? We would not flatter you, that your case is better than you suspect: but we propose a remedy, which is adapted to persons of your description, and in every respect adequate to your wants: Only be you persuaded, to come and submit to this Prince of peace; and humbly and thankfully receive those inestimable blessings, which he waits to give, and which none else can bestow upon you.

Or, does the remembrance of your former enmity against him discourage you? Just cause, indeed, you have for shame and humiliation. But behold, how rich his grace! No sooner shall he perceive you prostrate at his feet, confessing your iniquity, than he will say unto you, LIVE. Like Joseph's brethren, you may be troubled before him at the recollection of your guilt; but he will encourage and comfort you with such words as these, "I am your Salvation: fear not; your sins are forgiven you!"

Or, do you ask, What profit shall we have, if we apply to him? Enquire of those, who have made the trial. Were their petitions rejected; or their expectations disappointed? They will all testify, that his acceptance of them was gracious, that his communications of spiritual blessings have been liberal, and that he

* Matt. xiii. 46.

has bestowed upon them such strong consolations, as they had never before conceived, and cannot now express.—We would remind you also, that the consequence of not complying with his invitation will be more than a loss of happiness: it will be certain, final, and aggravated misery. If you continue to refuse submission to him, he will shortly vindicate his own character, and avenge the insult you put upon him. For “he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him*.”

* John iiii. 36.

J O' B.

C H A P. XI.

S E C T. I.

Job, the reality of his history—lived before Moses—his case instructive—of an excellent character—of high rank—religious—charitable—though dear to God, exposed to Satan's temptations—lost all his substance and children at once—submitted—afflicted with a grievous disease—forsaken by his acquaintance—tempted by his wife—yet justified God.

IT was a very remarkable caution, which a wise Heathen gave to the richest Monarch in the world; when, refusing to admire his wealth and grandeur and to pronounce him the happiest man, he warned him to consider, in the midst of his envied greatness, what the end might be *. The advice at the time was despised, but this exalted King afterwards felt its propriety, when, stripped of all his dominions, he was led in chains, and bound to the stake to be burned. The admonition perfectly accords with the sentiments and language of the inspired writers, who exhort us, “Not to boast of to-morrow,—nor trust in uncertain riches †.”

* — Cræsum, quem vox iusti facunda Solonis
Respicere ad longæ iussit spatia ultima vitæ.

Juv. x. 274.

† Prov. xxvii. 1. 1 Tim. vi. 17.

Our own observation, indeed, of common life, as well as ancient records, must furnish us with many examples of the precarious tenure on which earthly possessions are held. But, though the emptiness of all present things be generally acknowledged, men are still, with the greatest ardour, aiming at a state of opulence, as if this were sure to be abiding, when once obtained; and thus, with confessions of the vanity of the world, our souls are continually "cleaving to the dust."

The character, which now comes before us, will admonish us, in a forcible manner, not to place our happiness in any outward advantages, inasmuch as they may suddenly be removed, or imbibtered to us. A more striking instance of this cannot be produced, than the history of Job, whom we shall see, in one day, plunged from the summit of human greatness down to the lowest abyss of distress and misery.

The book of Job is a composition of a peculiar kind, and, in the principal subject of it, is totally detached from all the other books of scripture. Its authenticity and inspiration have been generally acknowledged; but some of the circumstances relating to it have given rise to various disputes, into which however, as being foreign to our design, we do not intend to enter.

The original is written in metre, and is a poem of that sort, which has usually been termed the dramatic. There may be some allegory, and much poetical ornament and amplification; but part of the work contains a plain, simple narration of important facts; and these, chiefly, are what we are concerned with, as far at least as they exhibit the character of a very eminent saint.

It

It has been doubted, indeed, from the nature of the composition, whether the whole be not fabulous, or only a sacred parable, which has no foundation at all in real history. But to this the answer is obvious: It carries not with it the marks of a fable, but appears to be a genuine account, grounded on truth, though it be clothed in a poetical dress, and certain passages, especially the speeches, may have received some enlargement from the author, which is an usual licence in writings of this kind. We said that it stands alone, as being utterly unconnected with the other records of the old testament; but two of the inspired penmen bear witness, that there had been such a person as Job, of the very character which is here described. Ezekiel testifies of his eminent piety, and ranks him with those illustrious servants of God, Daniël and Noah, whose existence has not been questioned*; and St. James proposes him as a pattern of patience to all believers†. It deserves our notice also, that St. Paul confirms the authority of the book, by quoting it as a part of sacred scripture‡.

Very different have been the opinions of learned men concerning the time when Job lived. The most probable, and the most prevailing sentiment is, that he was descended from the family of Abraham, by Nahor his brother (amongst whose kindred it should seem that true religion obtained and flourished for a while), and that he is to be placed not far from the ancient Patriarchs. From many circumstances we conclude, that he was prior to Moses: the very advanced period, to

* Ezek. xiv. 14. † Jam. v. 11. ‡ Compare Job v. 13, with 1 Cor. iii. 19.

which his life was prolonged (not less, we apprehend, than two hundred years) forbids us to think that the age of man was then shortened to its present contracted limits: the nature and number of the sacrifices, which he offered, not being agreeable to the Mosaic institution, afford a strong presumption that the Jewish economy was not then established: and, as this book makes no mention of the peculiar situation of the Israelites under the law, nor contains any clear reference to the rites and ceremonies of that law, we are inclined to believe that the transactions, which are the ground of the poem, occurred before the astonishing deliverance of the Hebrews from their Egyptian bondage*. It has, therefore, been most generally supposed, that, during their oppression in Egypt, and at a time when little of the true knowledge or worship of God was to be found on the earth, this holy man lived, and spread his influence amongst an idolatrous people in the land of Idumea and Arabia. We have already observed in Melchisedec, and we now remark in Job and his friends, that God may sometimes be pleased to reveal himself to those,

* See this opinion judiciously stated and defended, in Lightfoot's works, vol. i. page 23; Lowth de sacra poesi prælect: xxxii, and in Sherlock's discourses on prophecy. Dissert. ii.—Dr. Warburton, in his divine Legation of Moses, brings down the date of the book so low as to the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, and supposes it to be written with a peculiar reference to the distress they might feel, upon their re-establishment in Canaan, because the extraordinary Providence, granted to their forefathers, was then withdrawn. But he allows that it contains a real history, and that Job lived, as represented above, in the Patriarchal age, or at least before the time of Moses.

who are not within the pale of his outward and visible Church. He is not confined to any particular means of communicating information; but he can make known his will, in the clearest manner, even to such as may seem the farthest removed from instruction: nor dare we exclude any persons from the possibility of attaining his favour; for "in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him *."

Various opinions, also, have been advanced concerning the author of this book, which has been by different writers ascribed to Moses, to Job himself, to Elihu, and to Ezra. But we enter not into so intricate an enquiry, observing only, that it bears the most evident marks of antiquity, and has generally been thought as old as the Pentateuch, if not the most ancient composition in the world. It is enough for us to delineate the character here represented, and to consider what lessons of improvement we ourselves may derive from it.

Some passages of the book will be found, perhaps after the most diligent examination, very difficult and obscure. But let not this discourage our serious attention to it. Many instructions, neither of doubtful meaning, nor of small importance, are to be drawn from it. The design of the whole is clear and most interesting. In the history of Job the conduct of divine Providence is exhibited in a very striking light: we are taught, that for wise purposes the wicked are permitted to prosper and to triumph, the righteous to be afflicted, tempted, and oppressed: we are constrained to reverence and adore the majesty of that God, with

* Acts x. 35.

whom we have to do : we learn the folly and the sin of contending with Him : and we are led to trust and to praise him, not only in a time of outward ease and comfort, but even when we feel the rod of his correction, and every thing dear is taken away from us.

Job is held forth, as it were, to public view ; and he affords a glorious spectacle indeed. Angels and men seem called upon to observe this most faithful and beloved servant of God, suddenly cast down from the height of prosperity, suffering accumulated miseries, and those of no common kind, treated as an outcast from earth and heaven, and maintaining a severe conflict against the powers of darkness. From such an instance we are almost ready to arraign the justice, the faithfulness, and goodness of God, and we ask, “ Is it, then, in vain to serve Him ? ” But the sequel of the history is expressly calculated to silence our proud objections, and teach us to submit with humility, faith and patience. For we behold this eminent saint, in the midst of his distresses, supported by an Almighty hand ; “ perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; ” exercising a firm confidence in God, by which he endured to the end, and triumphed over all opposition. May we be suitably affected by the sight, and learn what conduct becomes us, under the corrections of God, the reproaches of men, or the temptations of Satan !

In the very opening of the book, the excellency of Job’s character is brought at once into view ; and it is declared, that he was “ perfect,” without guile and hypocrisy, “ and upright,” possessed of, and actuated by
pure

pure and holy principles; "one that feared God," confessing and worshipping the true God, in the midst of Idolaters, zealous for religion; "and he eschewed evil," keeping at a distance from sin, and thus recommending his profession by the consistency and integrity of his practice*. We shall observe the justness of this description, while we accompany Job through the different circumstances of his life.

He is represented to us, in the former part of the history, as one of high rank, and abounding in all worldly possessions. An estimate is made of his substance, according to the simplicity of those times, from his very numerous flocks and herds, whereby it appears, that he had exceeding great riches and a most extensive household, and surpassed in opulence "all the men of the east." His wealth might entitle him to respect: but he was also a principal magistrate, if not a Ruler, in the place where he dwelt. For thus he speaks of his own exalted situation: "I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil; I went out to the gate through the city, I prepared my seat in the street; The young men saw me, and hid themselves; and the aged arose, and stood up: The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth: The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth:—I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a King in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners†." He was likewise blessed with domestic comforts, having seven sons and three daughters, who were settled around him, and lived

* Job i. 1, &c. † xxix. 6—9, 25.

together in prosperity, peace, and love*. What could have been desired more?

But alas! how frequently are the bounties of Providence a snare to the soul! Who forget God, so much as those who are intrusted with riches and power? Perhaps our integrity is put to a severer trial, when all things succeed to our wishes, than when the heaviest troubles assail us. We therefore pray, "In all time of our tribulation, and in all time of our WEALTH, Good Lord deliver us †."

Under the influence of religious principles, Job was enabled to stand against all the allurements of greatness. His piety and zeal were most eminent. He watched over his offspring with a tender concern for their spiritual interests, and offered up continual intercessions for them. It is observed more especially, that, whenever they had any convivial meeting among themselves, he called them to join with him in prayer, that they might seek forgiveness, lest something in their tempers or manners should have been displeasing to God. Behold here, then, the devout father, the pious master of a family! Job was the priest of his own house, and taught and required his children to worship at his altar. It appears also, that, in the midst of his affluence, he maintained sweet intercourse with God, and that his experience of divine comforts was the chief ingredient in his happiness. Such is his own description: "In the days when God preserved me, His candle shined upon my head, and by His light I walked through darkness; The secret of God was upon my tabernacle; The Almighty was with me ‡."

* Job i. 2, 4, &c.

† Litany.

‡ Job xxix. 2—5.

And shall any suppose, that an elevated station will excuse their neglect of religious duties? Rather, let it be concluded, that they are under stronger obligations than others, by their example and their influence to recommend and enforce the profession and the practice of true godliness. But, if we visit the mansions of our Nobility, shall we find them consecrated to God? Shall we observe parents and children offering up spiritual sacrifices together? Shall we hear of any such thing amongst them, as communion with the God of heaven? Who does not perceive and lament the very reverse of all this?

Nor did the piety of Job consist in words only, or in mere external forms of devotion. Its purity and excellence were manifested, by his vigorous exertions to render himself as extensively useful as possible, and by the whole of his amiable deportment. For the proof of this, indeed, we are indebted to his accusers, who compelled him to speak in vindication of his own character. With all the confidence of an upright man he declares, not in the spirit of boasting, but in reply to the false charges brought against him, "I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy: I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my judgment was as a robe and a diadem: I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not I searched out: And I brake the

jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth*. Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor†? I have not withheld the poor from their desire, nor have caused the eyes of the widow to fail: I have not eaten my morsel alone, but the fatherless hath eaten thereof; (for from my youth he was brought up with me as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb;) I have not seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; but his loins have blessed me, and he was warmed with the fleece of my sheep‡." Nor did his abundance minister to the purposes of pride or sensuality. His heart was fixed upon a better portion than all his affluence could give him; and in his most prosperous days he was humble, meek, and spiritual. "He made not gold his hope, nor said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence: He rejoiced not, because his wealth was great, or because his hand had gotten much§."

Who does not confess, that a rich man of such a character is a public blessing? The more exalted his situation is, the more enlarged will be his usefulness. His piety will add the brightest lustre to his high rank; and his wealth and power will enable him to do more than others can, for the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow creatures.—But have we not cause to lament the arrogance and dissipation, the covetousness and oppression of the great? How few are proof against "the love of money!" How few, who are

* Job xxix* 12—17. † xxx. 25. ‡ xxxi. 16—20. § 24, 25.

not abusing the gifts of God to the purposes of intemperance! Where are those, who live in affluence, and yet maintain an humble, spiritual mind? Where are they, who possess authority, and are not betrayed into haughtiness, cruelty, and injustice?—Be it our concern, as faithful stewards, to improve our talents. Though we have not the property or the influence of Job, may we not, in various respects, be “a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, and cause the widow’s heart to sing for joy?” But the large expences of many around us, who study only to gratify their vanity and sensuality, while they “withhold the poor from their desire,” will be “a swift witness” against them. As to those also, who are heaping up useless treasures, “the rust thereof will eat their flesh, as it were fire.” For “riches profit not in the day of wrath;” but then it will be found, that the covetous are those “whom God abhorreth.”

We shall not wonder to hear, that a person, so eminently holy as Job, was very dear to God. He considers his people as his portion and his glory; and, therefore, he pleads their cause, defends them from dangers, and rejoices over them to do them good. This will appear from the circumstance, which next demands our attention.

An account is given us of a remarkable conference, respecting the character of Job, between the most High God and the Prince or Leader of the fallen Angels, who is called Satan or the Devil. It may safely be granted, that, as this is a poetical description, the matter is represented with something of that fictitious colouring,

colouring, which is always allowed in compositions of such a nature. But it does not therefore follow, that the whole is a fable. So much is clear: There is an evil spirit, the enemy of God and of all righteousness, who is continually seeking to distress, to seduce, and, if possible, to destroy those who love God. He is their accuser and tempter; ever bringing against them false and malicious charges, insinuating that all their services proceed from a selfish principle, and laying snares for them, that he may draw them aside from the path of duty. He is, indeed, under the restraint of an Almighty Power, and all his devices are over-ruled: but he is permitted to shew his malignity, and to exercise an influence (in a way we pretend not to explain) over the minds of the righteous, as well as of the wicked. How far this influence may extend, we do not determine: but, probably, much of the unsteadiness and unhappiness of Christians is to be ascribed to his agency.

It will be asked, Why is he suffered to tempt those who are most dear to God? A right understanding of the present history will enable us to reply, that this is designed, not to gratify but to confound Satan; not to do him a pleasure, but to bring great advantage to them, and to advance them to a higher state of glory, while they are enabled vigorously to resist and finally to conquer him. He has been uniformly opposing the work of Redemption from the beginning; but that very circumstance will at last issue in the honour of God and the triumph of his people, and in the utter confusion and aggravated condemnation of the Devil.

While

While the Lord God testified of the unfeigned piety of Job, and as it were boasted of him, that there was none like him in the earth, the vile adversary, who is "the accuser of the brethren," suggested that Job did not fear God for nought, that he was consulting only his own interest, without any good principle in his heart, and that, if all his worldly enjoyments were removed from him, he would no longer retain his integrity, but curse God to his face. In order to prove the charge to be as false as it was malicious, permission was granted, that this holy man should be tried by the immediate deprivation of all that he possessed. Here the secret is revealed; the true cause of all the succeeding calamities is declared; and the plan of the whole book is laid before us. This remarkable history, then, exhibits a conflict between Satan and an eminent saint, or rather, perhaps, between Satan and God himself: for the Lord took part with his servant Job, and suffered him to be most violently assaulted, only that the excellency of his character might be more clearly manifested, and the Devil confounded in his purpose.

We shall hereby be led to account for some most afflictive dispensations of the divine Providence towards the best of men. Many of this very description may be weighed down with distresses of a complicated nature, and be ready to conclude, that they are utterly forsaken of God. Such persons especially are exhorted most seriously to consider the case of Job. Their situation may be similar to his; and from him they should be instructed to bow with unfeigned submission to the
God

God of heaven, to maintain their hope in Him, and to rejoice in the expectation of a happy issue.

Do you complain, that none were ever tried as you are, and that your sufferings are of so peculiar a sort, as to prove you to be the objects of God's heaviest displeasure; like outcasts, excluded from his favour? We would persuade you to suspend your judgment, till you have examined, with fixed attention, the history before you. Come, behold a man beloved of God, "destitute, afflicted, tormented," with whose calamities, either in weight or in number, your's will not bear a comparison.

Job, we have seen, was placed in an elevated situation, with great riches in possession; but in the short space of a day, without any previous warning, he was deprived of all his substance, and reduced to a state of contempt and indigence. One messenger trod upon the heels of another, with tidings of distress, declaring his numerous flocks and herds, his oxen and asses, his sheep and camels, to be taken away by rapine, or consumed by lightning from heaven.—Will it not be allowed, that so sudden and so entire a change of circumstances must be peculiarly painful? The dread of want is very frequently more than the human mind can endure: but in general, it should seem, the anguish on this account will be felt most severely by those, who have always enjoyed abundance. Shall we, then, murmur at, or even mention, our own trifling losses and disappointments, when we behold Job reduced much lower than ourselves?

He

He had been happy in his children, whom he had esteemed his glory, and as a crown upon his head*. But in the very same day, while he listened to the sad tale of his other misfortunes, the still more melancholy tidings were carried to him, that the house, wherein his sons and daughters were assembled for the purpose of a convivial meeting, had been suddenly blown down, and buried them all in one common ruin. Thus were his expectations of support and comfort from his offspring instantly defeated.—Are not many pining away with excessive sorrow, for the death of a beloved child or of some tender Relation, and complaining against God, because he has removed “the desire of their eyes?” But will you not dry up your tears, and restrain your murmurs, while you are witnesses to such an universal desolation in the family of Job?

And now the wish of Satan was gratified. According to his request, he saw this saint of God brought down to a most abject condition. But was his end answered? Did Job renounce his religion, or curse his God? No; the devil’s insinuation against him was most base; and the falsehood of it was evinced. Are we not solicitous to be informed how he endured his trials? We have observed, that his conduct was exemplary, his character unblamable, during his prosperity. But we have known many, who have appeared to pay a serious and consistent regard to the profession of godliness, as long as they have enjoyed their ease and succeeded in their worldly schemes, and yet have been unable to stand the shock of severe afflictions,

have given up their boasted confidence in God, and “concerning faith have made shipwreck.” If we search the habitations of the wretched, we shall not find in all, nay not in the most, a meek submission to the will of God, an humble dependence on his promise, and a cheerful waiting for deliverance in his time and way. But “ye have heard of the patience of Job.” He is held forth as an eminent example of entire resignation to the divine appointment, and of that unshaken reliance, which can trust God as much in darkness as in light, from an assurance that He doeth all things well. At the beginning, at least, of the sharp conflict we perceive an uncommon exercise of these principles, and from this part of the history, we apprehend, he has been celebrated as the most patient of men.

Behold him, then, stripped of all his possessions, no longer the father of a numerous offspring, but rendered childless at one stroke! He felt the weight of the calamity; he could not abstain from expressions of his grief; but he acquiesced; he justified God, and surrendered up all to Him. He arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

It will become us also, if deprived of any dear delights, to reflect, that very soon we must part with all, and that we ourselves must be consigned to the grave; that the favours, we here enjoy, were but intrusted to us for a short season; that the Lord God, as the absolute

lute proprietor of all, has a right to demand from us, what and when he pleases, and deserves to be loved, served, and glorified, when he takes away, no less than when he gives.—But does not this example reprove our murmuring, and peevishness, and unbelief? Have we not quarrelled with the righteous dispensations of God, as if he had injured us, because he has crossed our wishes, and resumed the blessings which he had only lent us? Let us bow before him in acknowledgment of his sovereignty, his justice, truth, and goodness. If, indeed, we “have believed through grace,” we should do more than submit, and justify the ways of God; we should praise him, and rejoice in him, as our unchangeable portion, even when we feel the heaviest stroke of his hand.

The sacred history remarks, “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” So far, then, the temptation did not succeed; the purpose of Satan was defeated. And did the malicious adversary desist from any further attempts? No: another, and a much more violent onset was made upon Job, under the permission of a gracious God. And we ought not to forget, that, though we may have gained one conquest, we are not therefore secure from all future assaults; but, probably, we shall soon be attacked again in some other quarter.

The Lord, who had beheld his favourite servant enduring the struggle in a most honourable manner, is represented as pleased with his conduct, and even glorying that his enemy was baffled in the conflict. He said to Satan, “Still he holdeth fast his integrity, although

although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without a cause*." But the base accuser insinuated, that Job might yet be very easily seduced; that his steadfastness was not surprising, as hitherto he had not been at all afflicted in his person; and that, if God would put forth his hand to lay any grievous malady upon his body, he would quickly renounce his principles, and curse God to his face. It was, therefore, permitted, in order to manifest the sincerity and strength of his faith, that he should be tried in the very way which Satan himself had proposed: and accordingly, a most-painful and loathsome disease, affecting the whole frame, was immediately laid upon him; and he became at once, a burden to himself, and an abhorrence to every one around him.

We enquire not what was the particular nature of this disorder: enough is told us, to prove that it was most excruciating, and rendered him a spectacle of wretchedness and horror. He was covered "with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal, and he sat down among the ashes." Thus he describes his own miserable state: "I am made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? and I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin is broken and become loathsome. My bones are pierced in me in the night season; and my sinews take no rest. By the

* Job ii. 3, &c.

great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me about as the collar of my coat. I am a brother to dragons, and a companion to owls. My skin is black upon me, and my bones are burned with heat*."

But had he none to administer consolation? Where were his numerous domestics, his friends, and relations? Alas! we cannot mention one circumstance, but we therein perceive an aggravation of his sufferings. Let us hear his own account: "My kinsfolk have failed, and my familiar friends have forgotten me. They that dwell in mine house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight. I called my servant and he gave me no answer; I entreated him with my mouth. My breath is strange to my wife, though I entreated for the children's sake of mine own body. Yea, young children despised me; I arose, and they spake against me. All my inward friends abhorred me: and they whom I loved are turned against me†."

He complained, we see, of the very wife of his bosom. Ah! what an increase of his distress was here! She, who ought to have been, above all others, his comforter in trouble, and should have encouraged his faith and confidence in God, seemed to take part with Satan, and performed the very office of the Tempter. She was at least a fit instrument for the Devil's purpose; for, doubtless, she acted under his influence, while she derided her husband's piety, which had brought him so poor a recompence, and exhorted him instantly to renounce it. "Then said his wife unto

* vii. 3—5. xxx. 17, 18, 29, 30.

† xix. 14—19.

him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die." The proposal, horrid as it was, coming from one so near to him, would have peculiar weight: and what wonder, if it had prevailed? For then surely we are in especial danger, when they, on whom much of our temporal happiness depends, solicit us to sin. We have need to beware of those of our own household. Yet even this trial, sharp as it must have been, served only to evince the continued firmness of his religious principles. "He said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh: what? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?"

How amiable the disposition of the pious sufferer! Still he remembered that the God of heaven had a right to inflict on him what He pleased, nor did he presume to call Him to account. How uncommon a measure of true faith was this, which supported him in his most abject situation! Here, then, we behold again the triumph of grace; the saint of God maintaining his dependence and submission, though every comfort in life had been suddenly removed from him, and calamities, the most painful that can be conceived, were at the same time pressing upon him. Satan was once more defeated; and all his stratagems hitherto were ineffectual. For it is added, "In all this did not Job sin with his lips."

We cannot but remark, that each of these trials would have been terrible alone, enough, it should seem, to put a man's principles to the test. What, then, shall we think of them all together? We know but

of one instance at all similar. The application is obvious: we remember Jesus: "His visage was so marred, more than any man; and his form more than the sons of men." "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*."

Shall we not take occasion, from a comparison of our own case with that of Job, to acknowledge our great obligations to the God of all our mercies? He hath indeed "dealt bountifully" with us. How numerous are our blessings! how few and light are our sufferings! Are our possessions continued to us, and our children flourishing around us? Let us bear in mind, to whom we are indebted for them day by day.—Do we enjoy a vigorous constitution of body, or any seasons of health? "Bless the Lord, then, O our souls, and forget not all his benefits; who healeth all our diseases; who redeemeth our life from destruction, and crowneth us with loving-kindness and tender mercies †."—Or have we any dear friends, who would rejoice to minister to our relief? Have we not one companion in particular, the partner of all our counsels, who, when we are afflicted, will share our griefs, advise, support, and comfort us, and thus "strengthen our hands in God?" We would praise the Lord for his distinguishing goodness, who has mixed so many favours with our trials.

* Isa. lii. 14. liii. 4, 5.

† Psal. ciii. 2—4.

Or, in whatever way we are brought into distress, and though our religious principles be assaulted; shall we not learn, from this pattern of patience, to endure all things with a meek and submissive mind, and still to "fight the good fight of faith?" It will become us to pray, "Lord, let me glorify thee in the fire. If thou art pleased to put me into the furnace, be with me in it. Let me thereby be purged of my corruptions, and, in thine appointed time, come forth to thy praise and honour."

The state, of all others to be most dreaded, is that of continual prosperity, attended, as it usually is, with a spiritual stupor, an utter indifference to the concerns of a future life. Are not many thus at ease in their sins? And shall we be satisfied to have our portion in this world, when it may be so soon removed? We may, indeed, go down to the grave, without any remarkable calamities, and be troubled with no terrors. But what awaits us in Eternity? There is a place of torment, where the suffering of the body, and the anguish of the soul together, will be endless and inconceivable; "blackness of darkness for ever; weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

O Lord, whatever dispensations in thy providence thou shalt appoint for us, deliver us from "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that never shall be quenched;" and enable us, amidst all that we may now feel, and all that we may fear, to look forwards with a hope full of immortality." Amen.

J O B.

SECT. II.

Job, visited by three friends—betrayed impatience—accused of hypocrisy—vindicated his sincerity, yet blamable—harassed by Satan—censured by Elibu—addressed by God himself—humbled and recovered—restored to prosperity.

WHEN contending powers are preparing for war; when the foldier is girding on his armour; and when the battle is already begun; a general attention is excited, and all around are anxious to know the decision, and on which side victory will declare.

We have seen Satan, the grand adversary both of God and man, like the great Goliath, vaunting himself against the armies of the faithful, and challenging Job, who was therefore called out to single combat, even as the stripling David went forth against the proud Philistine. We have beheld the formidable attack, which was made upon this servant of God, sufficient, we might have supposed, to have confounded the strongest. Both the first and the second onset were borne with a vigorous courage; but, as the conflict was not then ended, we are solicitous to be informed what was the issue, and in what manner the champion continued to acquit himself in so remarkable an engagement. This

is a contest of great importance to the whole Church of God, who may hereby be instructed and encouraged to “ resist the Devil, steadfast in the faith.” Let us consider it, then, with all serious attention ; and, while we “ hear of the patience of Job, and see the end of the Lord *,” we shall be animated to stand forth in the spiritual warfare, and learn what temper we should possess, if we hope to be crowned with victory,

Job was oppressed with calamities of the heaviest kind ; but, amidst them all, he maintained his principles, and, at the first, did not appear shaken in his confidence towards God. But we have known instances of those, who have manfully repelled one or two violent assaults, but who, when the mode of attack has been varied, or merely by the continuance or frequent repetition of the temptation, have been at last overcome. How, then, was the conflict supported on the part of Job, in the sequel of the history ? We shall still perceive him, even to the end, truly upright before God, and never relinquishing his dependence or submission ; but we shall have occasion to point out and lament a difference in his spirit and temper. Satan, doubtless, gained some advantage, by stirring up the depravity of his heart, but failed in his attempt to prove him a hypocrite.

Job, though forsaken by many, was visited by three friends, who, it should seem, were men of considerable rank and wisdom, as well as of real piety, and who came to participate his grief, and to administer consolation. Their design was excellent ; but instead of al-

* James v. 11.

leviating, they greatly aggravated his distress: "Miserable comforters were they all; physicians of no value." Nor is it an uncommon case, for sincere persons to suffer most painfully from their intimate acquaintance, from those too of the best disposition, and in whom they might have expected the firmest support. Let us "cease from man," from a dependence even on such, as are of soundest principles and most upright conduct. If our hopes of relief are built upon them, it is probable that we shall be miserably disappointed. But to God let us commit our cause, and look for our happiness in Him alone; and then we need not "be afraid of ten thousands of the people."

These pious visitants had conceived highly of Job's religious character; but they were staggered in their sentiments, partly by his very singular afflictions, which they rashly concluded the Lord God never could appoint for any one dear to Himself, and partly by some wrong tempers which he discovered in their presence. These defects we must faithfully point out; for let not our wisdom conceal or palliate the failings of good men, which it has pleased God to record. Let it only be carefully noted, that these things are written, not for our imitation, but for our admonition; that we may fear for our own souls, and oppose in ourselves, what we must condemn in others.

The three friends of Job sat with him upon the ground, in pensive silence, for many days, expressing, by their actions at least, their condolence with him: and perhaps, through excess of sorrow, upon their first meeting, they might be as unable to suggest any suit-

able counsel, as he to receive it. "AFTER THIS" (after he had for some time manfully endured the sharp struggle) he betrayed a different spirit; "he opened his mouth and cursed his day *." He did not, indeed, comply with Satan's temptation so far as to curse his God; but, in a most unbecoming manner, he complained that he had ever been born. We do not follow him through all the bitter lamentations, which he uttered; but we must observe, that herein a most grievous change appeared, and that, instead of his former meekness, composure, and resignation, we perceive sad symptoms of pride, fretfulness, and impatience. Upon this commenced the long disputation between him and his visitants, which occupies the chief part of the book. We enter not into the particulars of that warm contest, remarking only the principal subject of it, and the behaviour of Job in it.

The grand question, on which they debated, was, whether any one, of real piety, ever was, or could be, so given up of God to the most extreme suffering, as Job seemed to be; or, in other words, whether he had not been hitherto deceiving himself and others in his professions of godliness. They were, clearly, mistaken in their hasty conclusions against him, though their sentiments of religion, upon the whole, appear to be just and consistent. They insinuated, that, from the circumstances in which he was placed, he must have been a hypocrite; and from this general censure they descended to some special charges, and directly accused him of the very crimes, he had always abhorred, in-

* iii. 1.

justice, oppression, covetousness. "Is not thy wickedness great? and thine iniquities infinite? For thou hast taken a pledge from thy brother for nought, and stripped the naked of their clothing. Thou hast not given water to the weary to drink, and thou hast withheld bread from the hungry. But as for the mighty man, he had the earth: and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee*."

In reply to these groundless imputations, it was not wrong for Job to vindicate his own character. Like Saint Paul, in later times, he was compelled by his accusers to speak, what he would otherwise have suppressed. To the very rash judgment, passed upon him, we must ascribe much of what he advanced in commendation of himself; which should not be censured as vain-glory, but considered rather as the honest confidence of one, conscious of his integrity, and pained with the unjust reproaches of those he loved. He could not allow that he had been a deceiver; and, therefore, he could say with sincerity, "Thou knowest that I am not wicked. I will maintain mine own ways before him. My step hath not turned out of the way, nor mine heart walked after mine eyes, nor hath any blot cleaved to my hands†." But perhaps he went too far, even in his own defence; and we grant, that some of his expressions are inconsistent with that humility, which marked his general character. As if he had been

* xxii. 5—10.

† x. 7. xiii. 15. xxxi. 7.

“clean without transgression*,” he boasted, “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined: neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live†.”

He was not ignorant of his own depraved and sinful state, and at times he made a suitable acknowledgment of it: “I have sinned; what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men? Though I were righteous, yet would I not answer, but I would make supplication to my judge‡.” But he certainly forgot his proper place, both as a creature and a sinner, when he so confidently appealed to the tribunal of God, and challenged Him to dispute the matter: “Let him take his rod away from me; and let not his fear terrify me: then would I speak, and not fear him. Surely I would speak to the Almighty; and I desire to reason with God. Call thou, and I will answer, or let me speak, and answer thou me. Oh, that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. Behold, my desire is that the Almighty would answer me§.”

We discover in Job the most evident marks of meekness and resignation; and hence he said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:—All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come;

* xxxiii. 9. † xxiii. 11, 12. xxvii. 6. ‡ vii. 20. ix. 15.

§ ix. 34. xiii. 3, 22. xxiii. 3, 4. xxxi. 35.

When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold *." But we cannot reconcile it with due submission, that he should dwell upon his sufferings with loud and continual complaints: and we feel a mixture of grief and horror, when we hear him expressing his wish to be destroyed, and charging God with cruelty: "Oh that I might have my request! and that God would grant me the thing that I long for! Even that it would please God to destroy me; that he would let loose his hand, and cut me off! He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me: he gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me †."

In the midst of his distresses we perceive him to be supported by a lively dependence upon God, and "a hope full of immortality." He prophesied of the Redeemer's coming; and, as if he were favoured with clear views of Gospel light, he testified his firm expectation of a resurrection to life eternal, and of the beatific vision of God, through the merits of his Saviour. We almost envy his situation, when we hear him cry out, "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another ‡." But how short the consolation! How sad a difference do we

* xiii. 15. xiv. 14. xxiii. 10. † vi. 8, 9. xvi. 9. xxx. 21.

‡ xix. 25-27.

discover! At other times the very foundation of his faith was shaken; his mind was filled with horror and confusion, and distracted with black, melancholy, and despairing thoughts. What else is implied in such complaints as these? "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies. Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him *."

We do not attempt to justify his expressions, or his tempers, but we can account for them, when we reflect on the state of human nature, even in those who are truly upright and eminent in holiness. It is a painful and humbling consideration, that much corruption remains in the saints of God, and that their peculiar excellencies are often darkened by failings exactly opposite. For we have already observed, on one occasion, intemperance in Noah, on another unbelief in Abraham, and now it must be granted, there was impatience in Job. This concession, respecting his imperfection, will not militate against his sincerity. For it will be recollected, that his general and prevailing disposition was very different from that, which we have here censured: and it will soon appear, that he felt a deep conviction of his offence, and most bitterly lamented it. The world, we know, are eagle-eyed in discovering the least misconduct of religious persons, and studiously keep out of sight whatever may make for their

* vi. 4. xix. 11. xxiii. 15.

defence and commendation. But true candour, surely, will require, that the whole of a character should be examined, and not merely a detached part, in order to form a proper judgment concerning it. Who, then, upon a careful attention to the history before us, will presume to condemn Job, or to acquit themselves? "Let him, that is without sin, cast the first stone." Ah! how many more, and worse, defects do we perceive in ourselves, than we can possibly find out in any other!

We must also suggest another reason for what we blame in this good man, which may account for, if not in some measure extenuate, his guilt. We need not mention that his afflictions were singularly oppressive; but it ought not to pass unobserved, that he was harassed, throughout, with the most horrid temptations from the Devil. An invisible, and very powerful, enemy was let loose upon him, with no other restraint, than that his life should be spared*; and to the vile suggestions of that malicious foe we are willing to ascribe a considerable part of the confusion and distress of Job. Probably many of those inconsistent and despairing expressions, which he used, had their rise from that quarter; for they seem as if they were immediately and strongly suggested to him; so that he spake another's language, rather than his own. In such cases, we say not that there is no sin, but that great allowances are to be made; and much of the offence, doubtless, will be imputed to Satan.

Are there not those, at this very time, who, with the sincerest piety, are yet tempted to give up all expectations of mercy, and often distracted with thoughts, distressing to themselves, and dishonourable to God? This is indeed a "fiery trial," of all others the most painful. But let them not be surprised or staggered, "as though some strange thing happened unto them." While they behold one, so excellent, and so dear to God, as Job was, in a similar situation, let them not despond, but hope for a happy issue.

But why speak we of some? We are all exposed to the secret assaults of the same adversary. For all, who are engaged in the Christian warfare, have to "wrestle against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places *." And while we are maintaining the glorious fight, we may adopt the Apostle's description, "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to Angels, and to men †." All eyes are upon us, observing how we acquit ourselves in the combat. O let us be strong in the Lord! The conflict may be sharp, but will not be long, and it will surely end in the everlasting destruction of our enemies. For "the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly ‡."

The question may be put, "Are not temptations the occasion of much sin?" True; they are. But let no accusation be therefore brought against the holiness or the goodness of God, for permitting them. For hereby he is pleased to manifest to his people, what they know

* Eph. vi. 12.

† 1 Cor. iv. 9.

‡ Rom. xvi. 20.

but very imperfectly, the extreme and total depravity of their nature. Hence they are led to a more constant exercise of humiliation, prayer, watchfulness, and self-denial, and to a more unfeigned and entire dependence upon Jesus for their whole salvation. Temptations do not, of themselves, render our hearts more corrupt, but draw forth to view the wickedness which is there already: they discover us to ourselves. Nay further, they are eventually a blessing, as being the very means, God hath appointed, to purify us to himself. "The trial of our faith is more precious than of gold, though it be tried with fire:" and therefore many "are in heaviness through manifold temptations," that they may be found at last "unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ*."

Thus, severe as the dispensations of God towards his children may seem for the present, he will therein manifest his power, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, on their behalf. When the whole plan of salvation shall be completed, the consistency and beauty of every part will be confessed by all. The redeemed of the Lord will admire the conduct of his grace; and, though they were at a loss to account for many things upon earth, in heaven they will sing for ever, "He hath done all things well."

In the particular instance we are considering, it is obvious, that, throughout this eventful history, the Lord watched over his servant Job with all the affection of a loving father. "You have seen the end of

* 1 Pet. i. 6, 7.

the Lord," (says St. James with a reference to this case) "that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." For, whatever was Satan's purpose, "God meant it unto good," and at last vouchsafed a favourable issue. "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? He will avenge them speedily*."

When the fruitless altercation between Job and his three friends had continued for a long time, another person is introduced to our notice, Elihu, who, as a Moderator between them, takes up the debate with great wisdom, and condemns both the parties †. He freely censures Job for the very failings, which we have noted in him, but does not therefore charge him with hypocrisy, as the others had done.

At length the God of heaven interposed, and decided the controversy in favour of Job, but not till He had first very sharply reprov'd the good man for his folly. With awful solemnity, the Lord summoned him to his tribunal, there to answer for his presumptuous expressions ‡. Such an opportunity of speaking for himself, Job had often solicited, boasting that he could order his cause before Him. But it is not so easy, as sinners may imagine, to contend with the Almighty face to face. The most holy persons, if called to a strict account, would be confounded in his presence.

The address of the Lord God upon this occasion was most remarkable. To silence and to humble

* Luke xviii. 7, 8. † Job xxxii. 1, &c. ‡ xxxviii. 1, &c.

Job, He represented his own glorious majesty, his unsearchable wisdom, his irresistible power, and uncontrollable sovereignty, as the Maker, Preserver, Governor, and Judge of his creatures.—How small a part of what He does, both in creation and in providence, do we understand! and that little is enough to shew us our own utter ignorance and weakness. Do we not perceive from his works, which are most stupendous, how great a God He is? “How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” Shall we, then, undertake to instruct Him, or quarrel with his dispensations, as if we could have contrived or managed matters better? Oh, the sin and the folly of pride and impatience in worms and sinners! The same argument, which is here pressed upon Job, Saint Paul makes use of, in order to obviate at once all our vain objections to the righteous government of God: “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus*?”

Could Job, then, stand upon his own defence, or maintain a contest with the Almighty God? No: he was instantly ashamed and confounded, for having dared to complain of the divine conduct; he confessed his guilt, and presumed not to utter one word more. “Behold, (said he) I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea twice; but I will proceed no further†.”

* Rom. ix. 20.

† Job xl. 4, 5.

This was a suitable submission, becoming a fallen creature. But, to fix this temper more firmly in the mind of Job, the Lord God went on with the representation of his own stupendous works, which are far beyond our power to control, or even our understanding to comprehend. The design was, to convince Job more fully of his impotence and insignificance: and at length it appeared, that the end was obtained. He acknowledged the sovereignty of God, and his own baseness in having spoken things which he knew not*. Now he perceived, more than ever he had done before, the glorious character of God; and the consequence was, the deepest abasement of soul, under a sense of extreme vileness: “ I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Thus was Job effectually recovered to his obedience, and established in a right frame of mind. Nor are we, under our severest trials, in the way to be delivered, till we be laid low with profound humility, till all our boastings and complaints be silenced: “ For God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble †.” Shall we not, then, enquire, What spirit are we of? If even Job failed in the judgment, shall any of us undertake to justify ourselves, or dare to contend with the God of Heaven? Are we aware of the greatness of His majesty? “ Have we an arm like God? or can we thunder with a voice like Him?” Have we

* xlii. 1, &c.

† 1 Pet. v. 5.

not yet to learn, what is our own character? Or are we willing to adopt the confession of this righteous man, "Behold, I am vile!" Would not such language be thought too mean and degrading for us? And yet it suited the most eminent saint, that was then upon the earth, at the very time when he was evidently under the highest influence of divine grace. Will it not, therefore, be the most horrid presumption, for us to indulge the vain conceit of any native goodness, or meritorious obedience?

It will become us also, to examine, What have we understood of the holy nature of God? Has not all our knowledge of him, hitherto, been only like "the hearing of the ear?" What have we seen of his glory, or discovered of his excellency, for ourselves? Is it not owing to our ignorance of his perfections, that we do not more unfeignedly "abhor ourselves, and repent in dust and ashes?" "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."

No sooner was Job made truly sensible of his offence, than the divine favour was manifested towards him. The Lord himself pleaded the cause of his servant against those who had accused him, asserted his integrity, and sharply reproved them for their rash judgment. They were even referred to the man, whom they had condemned as a hypocrite, that he might offer sacrifice and pray for them. Thus the very dark cloud, which had long hovered about Job, began to disperse; and the prospect brightened around him.

Perhaps many of God's dearest children may lie under the most unjust reproaches, which they are unable to remove. But it will become them to be more solicitous to preserve a proper temper in themselves, than to confute their adversaries. Their cause is in good hands, where they should be content to leave it, till God himself shall "make manifest the counsels of the hearts." "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father." But does not the thought of that day strike a terror into the consciences of sinners? What transactions of iniquity will then be disclosed before the assembled universe? And how base will many characters appear, which may now be admired amongst men!

It was an honour put upon Job, and likewise a testimony of his meek and loving spirit, that "he prayed for his friends." Nor can we have a stronger proof, that prayers and intercessions for each other, especially for our offending brethren, are peculiarly acceptable to God, than what is here related. For then "the Lord turned the captivity of Job," when his resentment against his accusers was extinguished, and he put up to Heaven his charitable petitions for them. The poor sufferer was restored to great abundance and prosperity: he received even twice as much as he had before possessed; so that his latter end was better than his beginning. The Lord gave him favour amongst an extensive acquaintance, a very large property, a numerous issue, and an honourable old age. "He brought him out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake his bands in sunder. Oh, that men would
praise

praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men*!"

What cannot He do for his people, since "the earth is His, and the fulness thereof?" We do not, indeed, expect the same kind of interposition, as Job had, but we look for a still happier restoration in the world above. Thither let us direct our views, "and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ†." What, though we should suffer to the latest hour? If we suffer with Jesus, we shall be also glorified together‡. After a few years of disease and poverty, Lazarus was conveyed into Abraham's bosom§; and very soon shall all the faithful followers of the Lamb, "who come out of great tribulation," share in the same exalted honour and felicity, "when the Lord shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe||."

Be encouraged, therefore, you afflicted, despised, and tempted Believers! Learn from this history, with what meekness and submission you should bear your trials. Wait, and trust, and rejoice; and you shall not be disappointed of your expectation. In the mean time, let the prospect of the kingdom, prepared for you, enliven and animate your souls.

But may we not warn careless sinners of approaching destruction? Some, who may cast their eyes upon these pages, may know nothing of the temptations of Satan, of which we have been speaking. Are you

* Psal. cvii. 14, 15. † 1 Pet. i. 13. ‡ Rom. viii. 17.

§ Luke xvi. 22.

|| 2 Thess. i. 10.

therefore (we would ask) in a safer state? It is the usual device of the Devil to stupify and lull to sleep, not to alarm by any violent assault, those whom he leads captive at his will.—But, though you may not be tempted, it is not probable, in the common course of Providence, that you will avoid afflictions: and, when your most beloved enjoyments are taken from you, have you any principles, from which you can derive support and comfort? Or what deliverance do you look for? May you not justly fear, that your's are only “the beginning of sorrows?” And how terrible a case,—to suffer both here, and for ever! O be alarmed for your danger, you that forget God! “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.”

M O S E S.

C H A P. XII.

SECT. I.

*Moses—state of religion and of the Israelites at his birth
—concealed—exposed on the river—taken up and adopted
by Pharaoh's daughter—joined the Hebrews—rejected
by them—fled for his life to Midian, and dwelt with
Jethro as a shepherd.*

THE history of mankind presents us with no very flattering views of human nature, but rather affords the most convincing evidence of our entire depravity. The whole of our race have cast off their allegiance to the government of their Creator; and though He has interposed, at different times and in various ways, to introduce and establish in the earth the true knowledge and worship of Himself, they have ever been unwilling to return to him, and, when recovered to obedience, continually prone to depart from him. Hence we observe, that the frequent revelations, which it pleased God to make of Himself in ancient days, were very soon corrupted. Real religion, wherever it has been revived for a season, has gradually declined; nor has purity of doctrine, any more than strict holiness in practice, been faithfully adhered to, for any considerable period, by any people, nation, or family whatever.

A church, separated from the rest of mankind for the service of God, there has been from the beginning. But the preservation and continuance, as well as the first formation, of this society has manifestly been owing not to any wisdom, moral ability, or virtuous principles in our nature, but to the rich and sovereign mercy of God, who, for his own name's sake, has never totally left us to ourselves, but has exerted his own Almighty power, in an immediate and (we might add) in a visible manner, for the planting and supporting of true religion in the world.

We have seen, that, very soon after the creation, wickedness prevailed, and that, in the days of Noah, there was a general and almost universal degeneracy; so that, among the thousands who inhabited the earth, there was nothing like genuine piety to be found, except in one family, and perhaps in one individual. Then God interposed, in a most tremendous way, to maintain his own cause, rescued his faithful servant from the destruction which he brought upon the ungodly, and again revealed his will. But did Noah's posterity long adhere to the pure worship of God? No: in little more than four hundred years from the deluge, it seemed as if religion would have perished, had not the Lord God made a fresh manifestation of Himself in the call of Abraham, and, by a new dispensation, separated his seed from the rest of mankind to be the guardians of divine truth.

Was, then, the sacred trust, committed to the household of Abraham, preserved inviolate? Alas! even his favoured descendants, in a few generations, would
have

have sunk into Paganism and Idolatry, and all the principles of Revelation would have been either totally lost, or sadly corrupted, by their inter-community with the nations of the world, if the Lord had not arisen to vindicate his own honour, and secure a Church for himself. In four hundred and thirty years after the Covenant had been established with Abraham, the Israelites, who were settled in Egypt, were almost universally attached to the superstitious worship of false gods, which obtained in that kingdom, and were content to renounce the service of Jehovah, and to adopt all the foolish and impure rites of the Heathens*.

Then the Lord God determined to do a new thing in the earth. That he might still have a peculiar people, distinguished from all others, and that he might thereby preserve among men the pure profession of his truth, he resolved to take this chosen family, the posterity of Abraham, out of Egypt, and to place them in a country by themselves. Thither he proposed to conduct them, and there to establish them as a separate community, under such regulations, that they should hold no intercourse with any of the surrounding nations, and under a government of a singular kind, the administration whereof He, as their chief magistrate, would reserve in his own hands. A dispensation this, the most wonderful and astonishing of any, that had ever been from the foundation of the world.

While, therefore, we learn, that there is a proneness in human nature to corrupt and depart from the purity of religion, though received immediately from heaven,

* See Ezek. xx. 8.

and that it cannot any where be revived, or maintained, but by the exertion of a divine power, let us pray, "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake as in the ancient days, in the generations of old*."

To accomplish the great deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, to form and settle both their civil and ecclesiastical polity, a suitable instrument was raised up, and eminently qualified for the arduous task: Moses, the man of God, whose character is now before us, was appointed to the work. The whole of this transaction, which we contemplate with devout astonishment, redounds, not so much to the praise of Moses, as to the glory of the God of Israel, to whom our chief regard and our warmest acknowledgments should be paid. We admire and adore that grace, which was manifested, not to Moses only, but, in and through him, to all the Jewish nation, and to the universal Church of God in every succeeding age. He was called to a situation the most difficult and perilous, and for that purpose he was furnished with peculiar talents: for his abilities were, probably, superior to what any other saint or prophet in the old testament possessed. It is evident, that none were admitted to a more familiar intercourse with God, or appointed to a more honourable service. Such is the description given of him: "There arose not a prophet like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, and to all his servants,

* Isa. li. 9:

and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror, which Moses shewed in the fight of all Israel*.”

The family of Jacob, who, as we have seen, were transplanted into Egypt, flourished under the care and protection of Joseph †. But Joseph was removed, and their posterity were left, as strangers in a foreign land, without any patron or defence. And yet, for many years, while the character of Joseph was fresh in remembrance, and the benefits, derived from his administration, were recollected, they were treated with kindness by the Egyptians for his sake. But at length, when another Pharaoh, very different from the prince who had promoted Joseph, came to the crown, no regard was paid to the memory of Joseph, no gratitude was felt towards that eminent benefactor and saviour of the nation. His descendants, and those of his father's house, were beheld with a jealous eye, and considered as intruders into a country, where they had no right; and from their increase, which had been wonderfully rapid, they appeared formidable to the Egyptians; so that it was apprehended, they would soon possess themselves of the whole kingdom. It was, therefore, determined, on the principles of human policy, to oppress and persecute the Israelites in various ways, in order to prevent their growth, and to check any aspiring thoughts of dominion, which they might possibly indulge.

But the plan did not succeed; because the will of God had decreed otherwise. Exactions were multiplied upon the poor afflicted Hebrews, and yet their num-

* Deut. xxxiv. 10—12.

† Exod. i. 7, &c.

bers were proportionally augmented; till at length the cruel tyrant meditated their utter extirpation. But in that also he was disappointed. The midwives, whom he fixed upon as the instruments of his detestable barbarity, and strictly charged to murder every male child in the birth, through the powerful influence of God upon their minds, dared not to execute the command. A fresh scheme, therefore, was adopted; but like all the schemes of sinners, in avowed opposition to God, it did not frustrate, but tended immediately to promote, the design of Heaven. Pharaoh enacted that every son, which the Israelites might have from that period, should be cast into the river. This circumstance seemed to threaten their whole race with desolation; but, under the direction and control of the Lord Almighty, who was engaged for their defence, it proved the means of accomplishing their deliverance.

Years before
Christ, 1571. How distressing must have been the situation of the Hebrews, whose helpless offspring were appointed to be exposed upon the deep waters, where nothing could be looked for but instant death! We forbear to describe the feelings of horror, which every tender father and mother must have experienced upon the birth of a male child. We need not say, that, with inexpressible anguish to them, the mandate was obeyed; or that those, whom a sense of duty or natural affection compelled to conceal their infant, were held in continual terror. Such, then, were the difficulties, in which the parents of Moses were involved; for he was born at that very time, and therefore doomed by the edict to perish in the river. — How
little

little are we sensible of our peculiar mercies, who are permitted to bring up our children without fear or interruption! Many and painful anxieties we must have for our rising families, even in the most peaceful circumstances; but let us bless God, that we are not kept in the dread of having our dear babes strangled or drowned before our eyes. Yet in every danger let us learn to intrust them with Him, whose love is equal to his power; and let us rest assured, that, while they are under his care, “no weapon that is formed against them shall prosper,” and that, if He be pleased to appoint them to any service in his Church, none can defeat his purpose, or “pluck them out of his hands.”

The parents of Moses were of the house of Levi, and, from their conduct on this occasion, we are willing to conclude they were pious persons*. We do not indeed perceive, that they had formed any previous determination to hazard their own safety for the preservation of their infant; but upon its birth there was something particularly striking in its appearance, which was considered as prophetic of an eminent station or employment designed for it, and which, therefore, induced them to conceal it. Such is the description given of Moses: “he was a goodly child †,” “exceeding fair ‡,” “a proper child §.”—Was it, then, no more than an admiration of its beauty, which pleaded with them for its life? It is certain, that natural affection might have carried them much farther than

* Exod. ii. 1, &c.

† ii. 2.

‡ Acts vii. 20.

§ Heb. xi. 23.

this. But we are acquainted with their real motive by an infallible interpreter. They acted "BY FAITH;" and we know that faith must have respect unto some divine promise or intimation. Possibly, they might receive a particular revelation, that the babe should be the deliverer of their nation; or, confiding only in the general assurance, which had been given, that God would certainly visit and redeem them, they might conceive the hope, that their dear infant might be the appointed instrument of accomplishing their release. Committing it, therefore, to the care of God, and in a cheerful expectation of His gracious interposition, they resolved to hide it, whatever risk they might run; "and they were not afraid of the king's commandment."

After three months however, the concealment of their son was discovered; and, probably apprehending, that he might be forcibly dragged from them by the murderous hands of an executioner, they were driven to the very painful necessity of exposing him on the waters. The distressed mother, unwilling to give him up at once to immediate death, prepared a small defence of rushes, in which he might swim, for a while at least, upon the river; though, without some interposition, he could not long have subsisted there. The expedient, in itself, might be thought a poor contrivance; but it was made use of in faith, and deliverance was evidently looked for from Heaven. The sister, therefore, was set as a watch to observe the event, which could not by any foresight have been conjectured.—Thus also we may learn, not to neglect those means

means which are in our power (ineffectual as they may seem and certainly would be of themselves), and still to rely firmly upon God for success. Let us do all that prudence would suggest, and yet expect a favourable conclusion only from the Lord's blessing.

On what a precarious issue did the hope of Israel then appear to rest! But the matter was in God's hands; and with Him there can be no such thing as chance or uncertainty. He, who is the protector of his people, had contrived the way of safety; a way, which no human sagacity could have planned, or brought into effect. Just at the proper moment, He directed the steps of Pharaoh's daughter to the place where the infant was exposed. The little basket was discovered, and taken out of the water: the babe wept; at the sight of which the Princess, touched with compassion, instantly formed the determination to preserve and educate the child as her own. By the interposition of the sister, who stood by to tend the important charge, it was again committed to the care of its mother, who was then appointed to nurse it, not as a poor Hebrew doomed to slavery, but as an Egyptian prince. The name *Moses*, which signifies *DRAWN OUT*, was given him as a memorial of this astonishing deliverance, with all the circumstances of which, probably, he was acquainted in early life. In process of time he appeared at court, as the adopted son of the king's daughter, and received an education suitable to this elevated rank.

Here is a wonderful chain of events, all leading to one grand object, and all of them such as seemed most unlikely

unlikely to happen; and yet they were brought about by means, which would commonly be called accidental. It was the divine purpose to exalt Moses, in order to qualify him for the high office of the Leader and Commander of Israel. But the situation of that oppressed people, and the cruel edict of Pharaoh, were great obstacles to this intended promotion: humanly speaking, the thing was impossible. Who could have supposed, that the Princess of the land would be the instrument of preserving and advancing Moses, of defeating her father's design, and finally of rescuing the Israelites from their bondage? And yet no other person, probably, would have dared to save a life, condemned by the Sovereign, or could have effected the plan. Do we not see the hand of God, then, conducting her to the river's side, to the very spot, at the proper, the necessary moment? Shall we not allow, that the thought of adopting the child was by Him impressed upon her mind, and therefore that she persisted in it against many difficulties, which could not but occur to her? For, though she felt compassion for the perishing infant, yet when its mean original was considered, it must appear an unsuitable object for her notice; it was the offspring of strangers, who had no claim to her protection, who were become offensive to the whole nation, and were suspected to be dangerous to the government; and, as it was already sentenced to die by the express injunction of her father, she might seem to be acting a traiterous part in attempting its preservation. But, under the divine influence, all objections vanished, and the way was easy.

Upon

Upon a review of this history we are constrained to cry out, "When God will work, who can let?" Even Pharaoh's court shall receive and nourish the man, who is designed to crush the power of the tyrant, and to rescue the church. Shall we not, then, in the most distressing and perilous times, stay ourselves upon the Lord, and rest in cheerful hope and confidence of safety, through his Almighty protection? How readily can he accomplish deliverance, and make his very enemies subservient to his purpose! He is indeed "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working."

We have accompanied Moses to the palace: but we know little of what occurred to him in that situation. The sacred writers esteem it of small consequence to relate what is transacted in palaces, which are generally scenes of folly and dissipation, whilst they hasten to those events, however trifling in themselves, which concern the people of God. We have observed, that his education was suitable to a young prince of the highest expectations. For he was the adopted son of the King's daughter, and, as she is supposed to have been an only child, he was probably considered the presumptive heir to the crown. In this place he enjoyed peculiar advantages for the acquisition of human literature, as Egypt was eminent in the study of the sciences; and doubtless he received his instruction from the most illustrious Magi. He is therefore said to have been "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and mighty in words and in deeds*." Of this, indeed, he has left ample testimony in those valuable

* Acts vii. 22.

writings, which bear his name, and which have been a blessing to the Church in every succeeding age to the present day. By such a situation, then, Moses was qualified for the arduous task, which was afterwards assigned him. How wonderful are the appointments of Providence, which determine the bounds of our habitations! The most honoured instruments of glorifying God are often prepared for their work, by being previously cast, involuntarily or without any intention of their own, into those connections, in which they are furnished with the necessary accomplishments. Known unto Him are all his designs from the beginning: and when it is His purpose to call some favoured servant to an important office or employment, He cannot be at a loss for means to fit him for it.

What was the moral character of Moses in his youth, we know not. We conclude that he was acquainted by his mother with the circumstances of his birth, with his near relation to the Israelites, and with the expectation she had formed, of his being intended for very eminent services. But we are not told, what effect her pious instructions produced upon his mind, so long as he lived in Pharaoh's court. That situation was most unfavourable to religion; and, not improbably, whatever attachment he might feel to the cause of his oppressed brethren, he did not avow it, but joined in the usual customs and practices of the Egyptians. At forty years of age, however, from the noblest principles, he renounced his connections in the palace, cheerfully gave up all that a carnal heart would have desired (the means of sensual indulgence and
the

the flattering prospect of wealth and power), and openly declared his determination to take part with the despised Israelites.

Years before
Christ, 1531.

This extraordinary conduct may justly excite our wonder. It is so uncommon a case, to see men forego great worldly advantages, that we may well enquire, by what motives he was actuated. We perceive many considerations, which might have induced him to continue in his place: such as, the splendor, ease, and pleasures he then enjoyed; the expectation of being one day raised to the throne of Egypt; the opportunity, which that elevated station would have afforded him, of relieving and protecting most effectually the persecuted Hebrews; the difficulty and apparent impossibility of his succouring them, unless he retained his connections at court; the charge of ingratitude, to which he would be exposed, for deserting the very friends, who had preserved his life; the contempt and hatred he must look for, as soon as he avowed himself an Israelite; and the indignation of the king, who would immediately condemn him, as a professed enemy to the state.

Here were many reasons to persuade him on the one hand, and to terrify him on the other; and these things, doubtless, were represented to his mind in their full force. But he acted on a principle, which at once set aside all these considerations, as of no weight, and left him no room for hesitation. He formed his determination, in opposition to every worldly inducement, from a sense of what he owed to God, and in firm dependence on His blessing and support.

Here, then, we acknowledge him, not so much the polished courtier, as the devout and zealous servant of God; and, though he passed for a fool or a madman among the Egyptians, we admire “the exceeding grace of God in him,” and pray that we may be found faithful, even as he was.

We are not left to a doubtful conjecture about his views and motives on this occasion; for a sure interpreter has opened to us the secret of his heart. “**BY FAITH**, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward*.” Having been instructed in the divine Covenant made with Abraham and his seed, and in the promises of the Saviour, who was to descend from that family, he believed that they were under the peculiar protection of Heaven, and would surely be rescued from their miserable oppression. With fervent desire, therefore, to partake with them of their religious privileges, he resolved to join their society, whatever he might risk by it, and freely to sacrifice every temporal advantage, for the sake of that Redeemer, whom he professed to look for. This was indeed “the faith which overcometh the world.”

It appears also, that he had some intimations from God, besides the expectation he might have formed from the account of his parents, that he was designed

* Heb. xi. 24—26.

to be the instrument of delivering his people Israel. In obedience, then, to the will of God, and not in fanciful disgust, or through any moroseness of spirit;—in order to testify his readiness to do and to suffer all that God would have him, he cheerfully quitted his most enviable situation in the court of Egypt, and, like his father Abraham before him, “he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

But what was his immediate object? “It came into his heart to visit his brethren, and he looked on their burthens.” He was touched with compassion for their afflicted state; and he was desirous to contrive some way, if it were possible, to alleviate their distress, or else to bear his part with them. More than this; it should seem that he was forward to enter upon his office; and therefore, with great zeal, perhaps with an improper warmth, he proposed himself to them in the character, which he expected to sustain, of their deliverer, and looked for no other than a cordial reception from them. But his ardour in their cause met with a severe check, not so much from their enemies, as from themselves. Like the Saviour, whom he prefigured, he was at first “despised and rejected.” “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”

An occasion immediately occurred, which induced him to interpose. He beheld an Hebrew brother suffering by the cruel hand of an Egyptian, and stood up as the avenger of the injured person. In this contention he slew the Egyptian. What the circumstances might be, to render such an act of violence necessary or justifiable, we know not. Enough is not told us, to

enable us to form a proper judgment of it. Moses might be driven to it, in defence of himself, as well as of the Israelite; or he might consider himself authorized by a divine commission to vindicate the wrongs of his people, and to punish their oppressors. This event might also be designed to confirm his hopes of rescuing his countrymen from their miserable bondage, and of overcoming the Egyptians, as he had done in the instance before us.

But, while he was ready to assert the rights of his enslaved brethren, they were dejected; and, so far from seconding his endeavours, they quarrelled among themselves, and reproached him for his zeal in their service. On the very next day, a fresh instance was given of his regard to their welfare. Perceiving a sharp contention between two Israelites, he undertook to be the mediator, and with a very mild expostulation would have reconciled them to each other. "Sirs, (said he) ye are brethren: why do ye wrong one to another*?" It was indeed a distressing sight, to observe those, who were so nearly related by blood, and as closely allied by affliction, and who ought therefore to have had one common interest, taking part with their enemies, and by their foolish contests increasing their own calamities. What, was it not enough that Egypt oppressed and destroyed them? Must they also vex and devour one another? How suitable the admonition of Moses; "Ye belong to the same family, and should study to promote your mutual benefit and comfort."—May we not apply this wise reproof to those warm disputants,

* Acts vii. 26.

who,

who, by their fierce debates, divide and weaken the Christian Church? They forget surely, that they are "brethren," or else much of the animosity that prevails among them would cease. "Why do ye wrong one to another?" Leave to your adversaries the work of persecution, but be you "kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love."

Was, then, the mediation of Moses accepted? No: they understood not that he was appointed to be their ruler and their judge; and accordingly they spurned at his interposition, and upbraided him with what he had done the preceding day in avenging one of their own company. This was a painful trial to him; and such a failure in his first attempts, we should apprehend, might greatly damp his zeal. "To what purpose (he might argue) have I renounced my former connections? If I am to be thus despised by my own countrymen, would it not be better to return to those, whose friendship I have forsaken?"—But, perhaps, there was a degree of forwardness and rashness in Moses, which the contempt, he met with, would serve to correct. He had much more to learn in true religion, than hitherto he had attained, in order to qualify him for his high office. Nor was the time of his delivering Israel yet arrived, though he was eager to be employed. They were to suffer oppression for a longer period, that they might be more effectually humbled; and, in the mean season, their numbers were increasing, Moses was better prepared for his work, the Egyptians also and the Canaanites were permitted to fill up the measure of their iniquities. For these ends the

Lord determined, that forty more years should elapse, before he would arise to maintain the cause of his oppressed people.

Do we not admire the divine patience and long-suffering, especially when contrasted with our vehemence and precipitation? The purposes of God are firm and sure; but He proceeds to the execution of them with a slow step; while we are full of ardour to hasten them. Our zeal, therefore, even when it springs from the best principles, is generally mixed with rashness and violence; and for this reason, doubtless, it pleases God to suffer those, whose hearts glow with a most fervent desire to serve him, to be disappointed in many of their first attempts. Not unfrequently they are opposed by the very persons, whose interest they wish to promote; not by the world only, but by the Israel of God. A trial of this nature is far more distressing than any contemptuous or injurious treatment from the avowed enemies of godliness. But let us be prepared for it, nor wonder, if our kindest interpositions, especially to make peace between our contending brethren, be rejected and reproached by good people. Perhaps we have been too forward, or acted too much in our own spirit; and therefore it may be of real advantage to us, to fail in our schemes. We shall thereby become more solid in our judgment, more steadfast in our purposes, more meek in our tempers, and more pure and upright in our motives. We may have sincerely intended to do the will of God, and what He also designs to effect: but, while our endeavours are defeated,

defeated, we learn to wait His time, and to depend upon Him for success.

Probably, what we lament as a fore disappointment, may tend to our own temporal security. This, we perceive, was the case with Moses. He found, by the opprobrious speech of the Israelites who thrust him away, that he was known to have slain the Egyptian, which made him apprehensive of danger. It soon appeared also, that Pharaoh, who was incensed against him, sought his life. The man of God, therefore, trembled for his safety, perhaps through a defect of faith, and thought himself obliged for his own preservation to become an exile and a wanderer. He fled to the land of Midian, far from all his friends and connections, and without any means of support or any expectation of assistance, but from God alone. In this foreign country, unattended, fatigued, and helpless, "he sat down by a well." How different his situation there, from that which he had lately deserted! Not long before, he had been surrounded with all the splendor of a palace; but then how distressing his prospect! At such a season, were there any considerations, which could relieve his mind? Yes; the very same which had induced him to quit the court: "He had respect unto the recompence of the reward." The grace, which had preserved him from the snares of prosperity, upheld him even in that most destitute and dangerous condition. He seemed, indeed, to have lost all: but he had committed himself and his concerns into safe hands. Let us wait to see the event. "O cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee!"

For

For “did ever any trust in Him, and was confounded?”

Moses obtained deliverance by an incident, which could not have been foreseen. While he sat by the well, the daughters of Jethro, or Raguel, a priest or rather a prince in Midian, came to water their flocks; in which office he readily stepped forth to assist them, and protected them from the violence of some neighbouring shepherds. This was an act of justice and of kindness, and was amply recompensed by the gratitude of Jethro, who invited the poor desolate stranger to go and abide under his hospitable roof. An attachment, it should seem, was soon formed between these two persons, who appeared to have been of a kindred disposition, alike benevolent and generous. “Moses was content to dwell with the man;” and this was a mark of his humility, destitute as he was, if we consider that he had been educated and had lived as a prince, and that he now became a servant, in the capacity of a shepherd, and cheerfully submitted to a laborious employment. But here the Lord provided him with an asylum, and blessed him with domestic comforts. He married one of the daughters of Jethro, by whom he had two sons.

In such a situation, little known, and little regarded, he, who had been heir to the crown of Egypt, who was appointed to be “a King in Jeshurun,” dwelt for forty years. Yet mean as his occupation was, this proved a very favourable retreat. We praise our God, who supports and defends his people, and never leaves them nor forsakes them, in times of greatest danger
and

and distress. Let us not doubt, even when we can see no means of safety or deliverance, that He will raise up friends, and open a place of refuge for us: Yea, He himself will be "a sanctuary" to us.

Moses, we have observed, was probably sent to Midian for considerable advantage to himself, that he might have more intimate converse with God. He had derived much benefit from his education in Egypt, whereby he became an accomplished scholar, an experienced statesman, and a valiant soldier. Thus he was qualified to stand before Pharaoh, and to command the Israelites. But as an Egyptian prince, he had less opportunity of improvement in true religion, than in his retirement, as a shepherd and a servant to his father-in-law Jethro. There he enjoyed every suitable convenience, leisure and solitude, for the purposes of meditation and devotion; which prepared him for that nearer intercourse with God, to which he was designed to be admitted. Yet it required peculiar grace in Moses, to be content to hide his talents in secret, and quietly to wait, so long a season, for the promised deliverance. The Lord's people are all eager to be useful; but many of them are unknown, and possess not the power of doing extensive good. This is meant as a trial of their faith. Let them only be diligent to make the best of their present obscurity, and be willing to be nothing; and they should not doubt, that in due time they will be brought forth to a larger sphere, if the divine wisdom shall judge it expedient for them.

How

How instructive is the example before us! Let us enquire, Are we like-minded with Moses? Are we ready, whenever required, to renounce the world, with all its pomps and vanities, its honours, pleasures, and preferments, from a real regard to Christ? We do not assert, that it is any part or evidence of true religion, merely to give up our situation: in general, we must abide in our calling. To forsake our appointed place, without some plain intimation that this is the will of God, would not be an act of trust or submission, but of rashness, perhaps of cowardice or presumption. But where our post cannot be maintained, consistently with a profession of supreme attachment to the Saviour, there the line of duty is obvious. Our Lord determined the matter, when he said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me*."

Is not the world, then, in one respect or another, a snare to our souls? Are we not hereby tempted, if not avowedly to oppose, yet shamefully to neglect the service of Christ? There are various hindrances in the way of a strictly religious life; but the faith of Moses would enable us to overcome them all. We may instance in three particulars:

1. The expectations of advancement. Something more, or something higher, is what most persons are seeking; and it is supposed (which in many cases is undeniably true), that any zealous exertions in favour of real godliness will prevent them from accomplishing their wishes; and therefore they beg leave to post-

* Matt. x. 37.

pone a due attention to the concerns of the soul, till their temporal schemes are settled. And shall We dare to act upon such a principle as this? Had Moses been influenced by the views of preferment, he would have continued his connections with the Egyptians, and disowned the Israel of God. But he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter,” and thus gave up his prospects of a crown and a kingdom.

2. The love of sensual enjoyments;—an idolatrous attachment to which is discovered on every side. The young and the healthy, if the means of gratification are afforded them, seem to think they have a licence to indulge their passions without restraint. The precept of Christ, therefore, “to deny themselves, to take up their cross daily, and to follow him,” they treat with contempt, and put off these uncomfortable duties to the aged, the sick, and the gloomy. Shall we not remind them, how different from their plan was the conduct of Moses, who despised, what they are so eagerly pursuing, “the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season?” He was in the full vigour of his strength, and had all the delights of sense at his command, yet he cheerfully renounced them all, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.” And this leads us to remark another hindrance of real piety,

3. The fear of reproach. Those, who will serve God faithfully, even in our own day, meet with many difficulties from the opposition of an evil world. Their characters are traduced, and their society is avoided, as most dangerous and opprobrious. Many, who acknowledge them to be right, and wish to be in their
state,

state, are deterred from forming any intimacy with them, lest they should come into the same disgrace. Thus "the fear of man bringeth a snare." Are we not under the influence of this principle? What prevents us from making a bold profession of the Gospel? Why are we shy of the acquaintance of those, who are confessedly "the excellent of the earth?" Are we not seeking the praise of men, even at the expence of truth and of a good conscience, unwilling to be accounted fools for Christ's sake? Where, then, is the zeal of Moses? "He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Let us not forget, 'it is THE REPROACH OF CHRIST which we are called to bear, by a steadfast attachment to his people, and by a courageous defence of the doctrines of revelation. And is not He worthy, for whom we should resign the favour of the world? "For our sakes he became poor," and "made himself of no reputation," that we might be exalted to eternal glory. "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him;" and like Moses we should "have respect unto this recompence of reward:" for thus only shall we be animated to persevere in our christian course, till we join the society of the faithful above, and receive the crown of life.

M O S E S.

SECT. 2.

Moses had a revelation from God at Horeb—unwilling to accept the commission given him—submitted, and departed for Egypt—obliged to circumcise his son—joined by Aaron, went to Pharaoh—repulsed—discouraged through unbelief—made a second attempt with Pharaoh—wrought miracles—led the Hebrews out of Egypt—pursued by Pharaoh—divided the Red sea—saw his enemies drowned, and praised the Lord.

It is the character of the Christian grace of Charity, that “ she seeketh not her own ;” and accordingly, the holy scriptures enjoin us, “ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others*.” Ah ! how many prove that they know nothing of this divine principle, while they live to themselves alone, and scruple not to sacrifice the interest and comfort of their nearest connections to their private gratification ! But the man of God, who is influenced by the noblest motives of pure benevolence, will rejoice in the opportunity of doing good to those around him, even at his own expence : especially, if he can, by any exertion, promote the cause of God, or of his Church, he will cheerfully forego whatever

* Phil. ii. 4.

is dear to him in the world, and welcome the severest trials. By faith he extends his views beyond the present scene of things, and will not, therefore, be staggered in his purpose, by the appearance of the most formidable difficulties.

Such an one was Moses. In possession of the highest temporal advantages, living in ease and splendor, and having all sensual enjoyments at command, he resigned them all, and preferred a state of poverty, contempt, and servitude; not only that he might preserve a good conscience, but also that he might lay himself out in the service of God, and the defence of his oppressed people. Thus far we have followed him, till he forsook the court of Egypt, not in sullen disappointment, but cheerfully; not in the fickle age of youth, when every wild scheme may be rashly adopted, but when he was forty years old, and had, therefore, attained a maturity of judgment and experience. We have seen him disappointed in his first expectations of delivering Israel, rejected with contempt, and obliged to fly, in a most destitute condition, to another country. There, though favoured with the protection and blessing of God, he was placed in no very eminent situation; for he was the shepherd, and the servant, of his father-in-law Jethro.

Thus retired from the world he had opportunities for secret devotion, which he improved to an excellent purpose. But he appeared far removed from all probability of interposing in behalf of the Israelites; and we apprehend, that, after so long a continuance in Midian, he had laid aside all hopes of rescuing them
out

out of the hands of their oppressors. We learn, however, to be ashamed of our selfishness, and of our attachment to present enjoyments, while we perceive the disinterested zeal of Moses: and we are instructed, by the delay which he met with, to correct our own hastiness even in our best schemes, and to be willing to wait the Lord's time and way, in order to bring them into effect.

Years before
Christ, 1491.

The bondage of the Israelites became more and more insupportable. The cruel tyrant, from whom Moses fled, was removed; but another of the same character succeeded. At length the Hebrews, bowed down under the heavy pressure, cried unto God for deliverance: and He, in compassion to their distress, and in remembrance of his holy Covenant, determined to break off their chains*. Moses, who had been appointed to the work, and had long been in a state of preparation for it, was made acquainted with the divine purpose. While he was diligently attending to the duties of his station, and feeding the flock of Jethro, the Lord appeared to him, in a most extraordinary manner, to reveal his designs of mercy†. And where shall We expect the presence of God, or the communication of his grace, but in the faithful discharge of our respective offices? The meanest employment will not prevent us from an intercourse with Heaven; nay rather, if it be our proper service, it will put us in the way of receiving some peculiar blessing, as a mark of our great Master's approbation.

* Exod. ii. 23—25.

† iii. 1, &c.

The place of the revelation was Horeb, the mountain, that was soon afterwards signalized by the still more remarkable intimacy, to which Moses was there admitted with the Lord God for forty days together. This holy man was suddenly struck with a most wonderful sight: a bright flame was seen in the midst of a bush, which, though it continued to burn, was not consumed.—The vision was mysterious and emblematical; a fit representation of Israel in Egypt, and of the Church in every age, under its severest persecutions, preserved from destruction by the presence of God. While we perceive the fire kindled, and threatening it with immediate ruin, we tremble for the consequence; but we forget, that the Lord himself dwells in the midst of it.

Moses gazed with profound admiration, and drew near to examine this surprising object. But how must his astonishment increase, when he heard a voice issuing from it, and calling to him by name, “Moses, Moses!” He was then commanded to keep at a distance, and to put off his shoes, in order to express a sense of his own defilement, and of his utter unfitness to stand before a righteous God. But who was the high and illustrious personage, that addressed himself to Moses * ?

That

* The person speaking to Moses is called, *Exod. iii. 2*, “The Angel of the Lord;” and yet this Angel is no created Being, for he assumes the incommunicable name of *Jehovah, iii. 6*. “I am the God of thy father, &c.” and says also concerning himself, “I AM THAT I AM.” The last of these expressions, especially, implies that he possessed such divine perfections, as cannot be ascribed to the most exalted creature: and yet that very manner

of

That he might encourage faith and hope, as well as excite the most profound veneration in his servant; He declared, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob:" as if he had said, "I am the God whom they worshipped, who am bound by the most solemn Covenant with them, to preserve and bless their posterity; I am the God, with whom they now live, and will continue to exist in everlasting bliss and glory*."

What could Moses reply? Or what effect had this declaration upon him? "He hid his face; for he was

of speaking Jesus Christ used, as descriptive of himself, and thereby claimed the attributes of Deity, when he said, "Before Abraham was, I AM," John viii. 58. The conclusion, then, is obvious; This is no other than "The Angel of the Covenant;" and He is no less than the supreme God. The same person afterwards appeared on mount Sinai, delivered the law to Moses, and upon various occasions, in revealing his will to the ancient Patriarchs, assumed a visible shape, which might be prophetic of his future incarnation. Respecting the Father it is said, "No man hath seen God at any time;" (John i. 18.) "Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape;" John v. 37. The angel, then, who conducted Israel through the wilderness, the God who was the Law-giver, and the King of Israel, was no other than the second person of the Trinity; who, "though he was in the form of God, was made in the likeness of men."

* From this text our Lord Jesus Christ has proved the doctrine of the Resurrection, (Matt. xxii. 31.) and shewn that the expressions here used concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, some hundred years after their decease, implied that they were still in existence with God. We conclude therefore, that the souls of departed saints, during their separation from their bodies, do not sleep, but are in a state of high felicity and glory.

afraid to look upon God." Do we wonder, that so holy a man should feel any dread upon his mind? May we not rather suspect, that our usual confidence and forwardness, in approaching to God, betrays an ignorance of Him and ourselves? Surely, the more we contemplate His greatness and purity, the more we shall be abased before him, from a sense of our meanness and depravity. It is observable, therefore, in the scriptures, that some of the most eminent characters have discovered the deepest humiliation, reverence, and confusion, even when God has been drawing near to them with the manifestations of his mercy. The righteous fear and hide their faces in the dust, when they behold the glory of the Lord, though He declares his love; but the wicked either care not for Him, or tremble only at the thunders of his wrath.

Is it not necessary to check that presumptuous spirit, which some persons discover in prying into the divine mysteries? "Draw not nigh hither;" but stand at a distance, to contemplate and adore. Do not also the ordinances of God demand from us the most profound veneration? For He is as really, though not as visibly, present there, as on the mount with Moses. Why, then, are we so trifling and irreverent, both in our inward temper and our outward carriage, during our attendance on His worship? Do we not forget, that "the place is holy ground," as being set apart for the purpose of maintaining an intercourse with the God of heaven? Even external ceremonies, in token of an humble frame of mind, may be proper and useful: and those are chargeable with a proud contempt of God, who superciliously reject them.

What,

What, then, was the design of this revelation to Moses? The Lord declared, that he had taken notice of the distresses of his people in Egypt, felt compassion for them, and would immediately interpose, to extricate them from their miserable slavery, and to conduct them to the promised land of Canaan. But who was to be the instrument of accomplishing this deliverance? To Moses himself was the commission given: "Come now, therefore, I will send thee," said God. And did not Moses readily accede to the proposal? Forty years before, he had appeared forward to stand forth, from proper motives, as the avenger of Israel, though probably with a degree of rashness and self-confidence; but in Midian he had learnt more of God and of himself, and therefore, under a deep conviction of his own unworthiness and insufficiency, he shrunk back from the office, to which the Lord appointed him. He replied, "Who am I, that I should do this?"—— But the backwardness, he expressed, did not proceed entirely from genuine humility: there seems to have been a sinful distrust, an unbelieving fear, which made him wish to decline the service. Alas! every grace in the most excellent character is not only defective, but mixed with some corrupt affection or other, which stains the lustre of it. Our zeal too frequently partakes of impetuosity and pride, our meekness degenerates into cowardice and inactivity.

We admire the condescension of our God, who bears with the perverseness of his children, answers their objections, and removes their difficulties. Was Moses discouraged at the greatness, or the danger, of

the work assigned him? The Lord comforted him with this gracious assurance, "Certainly I will be with thee." This implied a promise of support and protection: and could any thing further be desired? Alas! unbelief is always unreasonable in its expectations, and continually raises new cavils. Moses suggested, that such was the ignorance and obstinacy of the people, that they would not understand, and in a captious manner would question him, what was the name of the God who sent him. To this the Lord God replied, by declaring his own perfections, with unspeakable majesty, "I AM THAT I AM."—The expression bids defiance to all explanations: only we observe herein, that our God is incomprehensible, exists independently of all other beings, and is unchangeably the same, in all his attributes, "from everlasting to everlasting."

Moses, therefore, was instructed to assemble the elders of Israel, to open his commission before them, and to inform them, that the God, who was pledged to their fathers by solemn covenant, had taken compassion upon them, would rescue them from their oppression, and give them the inheritance of Canaan, which he had promised. But were they not a dejected people, unwilling to exert themselves? Yes; but it was intimated, that a divine influence should be put forth to incline them to pay an attentive and obedient regard.—He was also commanded to go boldly to Pharaoh, and to request their dismissal; but was forewarned, that in the king of Egypt he would meet with a determined and obstinate opposer, who would at
last

last be subdued only by the heavy judgments of God upon him.

Were not all the objections, then, of Moses silenced? No: We are surprised and grieved to hear him starting one difficulty after another, and expressly contradicting the assertion of God himself: "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice*." Such is the horrid nature of unbelief: it makes God a liar.—Yet the Lord bore with him, and, to inspire him with courage and confidence for his work, furnished him with indubitable credentials, by giving him some miraculous powers in proof of his commission. Did not that suffice? Alas! we are very ready to frame excuses, when we have no heart to undertake the service, to which we are appointed. Moses again dared to object his own insufficiency, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent,—I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue." Doubtless, this continued backwardness to obey the divine call, was highly blamable. This diffidence of himself betrayed a sinful distrust of God; for He immediately replied, "Who hath made man's mouth? Or who maketh the dumb or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore, go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."

What could have been required more? Yet after all, it should seem, Moses absolutely refused to accept the charge, and said, "O my Lord, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him, whom thou wilt send:" that is, "Send by some one else, better fitted for

* Exod. iv. 1, &c.

this office,—by whomsoever thou wilt, only have me excused.” This was most provoking to God: “ His anger was kindled:” and, yet he withdrew not the honourable appointment from him, but in great condescension promised, that Aaron his brother should bear a part in the arduous employment, and be his “ spokesman,” and that both of them should be furnished with all necessary instructions for their work.

How remarkable was this interview between the most High God and his servant Moses! We perceive nothing here, which can induce a suspicion of the integrity, or even of the eminence, of this holy man; but we see much to abase our pride, and to prove that the most excellent characters have great defects. Shall any boast, that they are able to stand in the judgment before God, when they hear that “ the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses?” Let us confess, that the Lord has been long-suffering towards us, and that “ it is of His mercies we are not consumed.” How backward have we also been to serve him! How many objections have we urged against the performance of the plainest duties! We may discover enough in the secret workings of our hearts, to account for all the inconsistency in Moses, and to excite in us the most fervent prayer, that God would not enter into judgment with us for our perverse opposition to His will.

At length, then, Moses, constrained to submit, obeyed the divine direction. Having solicited leave of his father-in-law to depart, he and his family

family together were dismissed in peace. Fresh assurances of the Lord's protection and assistance were given him; in dependence upon which he set forwards to contend with the king of Egypt, and to vindicate the wrongs of Israel. But how was he armed for such a conflict? He went with no other weapons or defence, than "the rod of God in his hand." So evidently did it appear, that "the excellency of the power," throughout this eventful history, "was of God and not of man."——The ministers of Christ go forth in like manner, upon their important embassy. They go, as Moses, with the rod of God in their hands, to conquer a host of the most formidable enemies: for the Gospel is that "rod of God's strength," whereby "the people fall under him*." "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ†."

A painful trial overtook him by the way. "The Lord met him, and sought to kill him." He was threatened with immediate death; and it was understood to be as a punishment for neglecting to circumcise his son. Into this neglect, we apprehend, he was betrayed by a sinful compliance with his wife Zipporah, who, from her objections to the ordinance of God, we fear, had no true sense of religion. The

* Psal. cx. 2. xlv. 5. † 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.

circumstance may appear trifling, but it stands as an awful admonition to us to obey God, though our dearest friends may oppose us. We shall provoke his anger, if, from any worldly considerations, we conform not to his institutions, yea even to the external observances, which he has appointed.

At the very time that Moses was invested with his office, his brother Aaron went by divine revelation to meet him; and thus, by the coincidence of the intimations given them, when at a distance from each other, their faith and courage were strengthened. They proceeded to Egypt together; and, having assembled the elders of Israel, they opened their commission, and, in proof thereof, publicly exhibited their miraculous powers. The people felt an immediate conviction, received them as the messengers of Heaven, and joined in a solemn act of adoration, to testify their gratitude and obedience.—At length they were emboldened to ask an audience of Pharaoh, and, in the name of the God of Israel, they requested permission of him to go three days journey into the desert, for the purpose of religious worship*. The petition was reasonable; but the proud king repulsed them with disdain, reproached them as the encouragers of idleness and sedition, and oppressed the poor enslaved Hebrews with increasing rigour and severity. The tyrant stormed and threatened; and their own brethren accused them of the basest designs. This was indeed a most distressing situation.

* Exod. v. 1, &c.

But was not Moses prepared for the trial by all the preceding admonitions and promises, which God had given him? Alas! how soon do our principles fail us, unless the Lord himself continually maintain them within us! Upon the very first difficulty, if left to ourselves, we shall forget all we have known of God, and, notwithstanding our past or present confidence, we shall fall into the utmost perplexity and despair. Moses staggered, complained unto God of the treatment he met with, and murmured at his appointment to his arduous post, and at his bad success in it. Surely this was wrong: but we learn from it to "keep our hearts with all diligence," while we observe, how prone we are to impatience and distrust, when our attempts to do good are defeated. Former sins, also, are suffered to gain fresh strength against us in order more effectually to humble us, and the rich grace of our God is displayed in pardoning and restoring us, though our backslidings are increased.

It should seem as if Moses would have laid down his office, before he had well entered upon it. But the Lord had compassion upon his infirmity, and encouraged him to proceed in his work, by giving him renewed assurances of support in it. Moses thought the case was desperate; and therefore God determined to interpose, that He might make his power known: "Now shalt thou see (said He) what I will do to Pharaoh*." And, in general, we remark that He is pleased to defer the execution of his plans

* Exod. vi. 1, &c.

till matters are come to an extremity, that his hand may be the more manifest.

The Lord added one promise to another, that he might remove the fears, and confirm the faith, of his servant, and sent him again to address the people with the most gracious declarations of the divine purpose to deliver them. But they would not hear: their spirit was broken through excess of grief, under the heavy yoke of their bondage.—The Prophet was then commanded to repeat his message to Pharaoh, and to require of this haughty tyrant the dismissal of Israel. But alas! Moses fainted through the discouragement he had met with from his own nation; and, as if he had forgotten or disbelieved all that God had engaged to do for him, he urged his former objections from his want of eloquence. “Behold, I am of uncircumcised lips, and how shall Pharaoh hearken unto me?”—It is a false humility, which would induce us to plead our own unfitness, when we are clearly called to any service. It is, rather, a very sinful distrust of God, who can work by the weakest instruments, and who alone can ensure success even to men of the most eminent abilities.

At last, however, the contest between God and the Prophet was decided. Moses was vested with most remarkable powers to execute the divine judgments; by which the rebellious king of Egypt might know that the God, whom he had defied, was indeed the God of the whole earth. “See (said the Lord) I have made thee a God to Pharaoh*.” We read not that

* Exod. vii. 1, &c.

so great authority was ever intrusted to any mere man. The Midianitish shepherd was commissioned to act as the representative of Jehovah, in the name of the God of heaven to call upon the proud Monarch to submit, and to punish his disobedience with the most tremendous calamities; he was empowered to inflict, or to withhold, the vengeance due to this obstinate sinner, till He was made to feel and to confess his own inferiority, and the uncontrollable dominion of the Lord God Almighty.

What, then, had Moses to fear? His objections were all immediately silenced; his faith was confirmed; nor did he any longer hesitate to undertake the work assigned him, difficult and dangerous as it was. From that time his courage was undaunted, and his diligence unwearied. • He went, accompanied by his brother Aaron, according to the Lord's directions, and demanded of Pharaoh the release of the Hebrews. This was the grand object of contention; and, in the maintaining of the debate, we perceive the ambassador of Jehovah conducting himself with a majesty, suited to the high character he sustained. To convince the unbelieving tyrant of the divine power, and to execute upon him and his wicked people the indignation of Heaven, a variety of miracles were performed, which were all of a calamitous and destructive nature. We stand at an awful distance to contemplate the desolating judgments, imposed or removed at the word of Moses: but we evidently discover the hand of God in them all; and, while we tremble for our own guiltiness, we cry out, "Who is able to stand before this
holy

holy Lord God*?" How many and inconceivably terrible are his methods of punishment! How immense the treasures of his wrath!

In the presence of the King, the rod of Moses was turned into a serpent, which swallowed up the rods of the Magicians, who had been permitted to imitate the miracle by their profane arts. At the lifting up of the same rod, the famous river, which the Egyptians idolized, was suddenly converted, in its various streams, into blood; and all the fish, which furnished a considerable part of their sustenance, being destroyed, became intolerably offensive for seven days together. At the command of Moses, the most loathsome frogs filled all their habitations; and upon his intercession, they were removed†. When he spake the word, both man and beast, throughout all the kingdom, were covered with filthy lice; which the Magicians, who had been suffered to proceed to a certain length with their enchantments, could not effect; and then they were forced to confess, "This is the finger of God." He called for swarms of flies, which immediately infested every house, and corrupted the land; while the Israelites in Goshen escaped the plague, and thus appeared to be under the divine protection; and again, through his mediation, the Egyptians were delivered. Upon his denunciation, a grievous and most fatal murrain was inflicted upon the various sorts of cattle, which destroyed multitudes of them throughout all the coasts of Egypt, while those of the Hebrews were in safety‡. Hitherto the persons of the Egyptians had been un-

* 1 Sam. vi. 20. † Exod. viii. 1, &c. ‡ Exod. ix. 1, &c.

touched;

touched; but no sooner had this mighty prophet sprinkled ashes of the furnace in the air, than very fore and painful boils broke forth on man as well as beast; and the Magicians themselves were thereby not only baffled, but obliged to retreat from his presence. When he stretched forth his hand, a most tremendous and desolating tempest arose: thunder and lightning, accompanied with hail, in a terrible and unexampled manner, instantly consumed all those, who, regardless of the warning, continued abroad, and laid waste the trees and herbage of the field; but at his prayer the storm abated.

Again he called upon the proud Monarch to humble himself before Jehovah*, and, upon refusal, he waved his rod and brought up an army of locusts, which obscured the whole land, and devoured the small remains of the fruit upon the ground: but, upon his entreaty, they were all removed. He gave the signal, and the light of heaven was withdrawn from the Egyptians, who were, therefore, filled with the utmost consternation for three days together; while the Hebrews, by a peculiar exemption, felt nothing of the formidable darkness. With astonishing intrepidity he ceased not to demand of the King the total release of Israel, without the least abatement. When this was denied, the Prophet threatened him with the last awful visitation†: and that very night, according to his denunciation, there was death in all the houses of the Egyptians; the first-born, the hope and comfort of every family throughout the kingdom, being suddenly destroyed‡.

* Exod. x. 1, &c.

† xi. 4, &c.

‡ xii. 29, &c.

The terror and distress, occasioned by such a judgment, cannot be described. The effect was what we might have expected. The haughty prince, though not humbled, was confounded; and both he and his subjects were urgent upon the poor oppressed Hebrews to depart from them, even before the morning light.

Never have we known any one so honoured of God as Moses was, “in all the signs and the wonders, which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land*.” The Jewish shepherd triumphed over all the power of that warlike nation. We are ready to ask, Is this the man, who not long ago betrayed such a timidity of spirit, such an unwillingness to undertake his work? What vigour, what boldness, what activity has he at length discovered! Let the praise be ascribed to our God, who fitted him for his office; and let us be encouraged from it to expect, that, as our day is, so shall our strength be.—It may appear wonderful, that no violent measures were used to defeat the purposes of Moses. Why was he not imprisoned, or put to death? But is it forgotten, that he was under the immediate protection of Heaven, and that Pharaoh himself was restrained from hurting him, and kept in continual dread of him? Moses was the executioner of divine vengeance, and therefore regarded even by his enemies with reverence and fear. Yet we have observed in him no haughtiness, no resentment against those, whom he was sent to punish and to destroy. He could

* Deut. xxxiv. 11.

say with Jeremiah, "I desire not the woful day." For by his intercession both Pharaoh and his people were long spared, and again and again rescued from the heavy judgments of God. He hath left us an example, "to pray for those who despitefully use us; to bless and curse not."

We have beheld the most awful desolation in all the Egyptian families; but the avenging Angel passed over the houses of the Israelites. They had been apprized of the event, and, in obedience to the command of God, were waiting in faith and prayer for deliverance. The whole congregation were required to celebrate, on that very night, a religious ordinance to the Lord; an ordinance, which became a standing sacrament in the Jewish Church, not only as a memorial of their miraculous escape at that time, but also as a significant type of the infinitely greater Redemption, which we obtain by our Lord Jesus Christ. The paschal lamb was sacrificed in every one of their dwellings: the flesh was eaten, and the blood sprinkled on the door-posts*. This was the token; wherever the blood was discovered, the Angel was commissioned to spare. "By faith, therefore, Moses kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them†."—We rejoice, that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast‡." If we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and His blood be sprinkled upon our consciences, most assuredly no destruction can come near to hurt us. Otherwise, we shall remain in worse than Egyptian bondage, the slaves

* Exod. xii. 1—28. † Heb. xi. 28. ‡ 1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

of sin and Satan, and shall soon be cut down by the hand of an avenging God.

It is remarked, that, while the Egyptians were urgent upon the Israelites to be gone, they enriched these poor captives with large treasures; for, it seems, they were so terrified, as to be willing to purchase their departure at any rate. Thus “the Lord brought forth his people with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person among their tribes*.” “They borrowed (or asked) of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and raiment. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent (or granted) unto them such things as they required; and they spoiled the Egyptians.”—This conduct of the Israelites has been much objected to, as a most flagrant act of injustice. But some considerations may be suggested in reply. The measure was adopted, at the express and repeated injunction of God himself†, who is the great and absolute proprietor of all; and it can be no injustice for Him, in whatever way he pleases, to take from one, and give to another. It may also be observed, that the Hebrews demanded only what was due to them as the wages of their most rigorous servitude for many years. Indeed it appeared, that they were not more forward to ask, than the Egyptians to bestow, who, like a conquered enemy, readily parted with all their spoil, in order to preserve life. Thus the Lord made the triumph of his people complete, furnished them for their journey, and provided them with a sufficiency for all the necessary services of his sanctu-

* Psal. cv. 37.

† Exod. iii. 21, 22. xi. 2. xii. 35.

ary. Their conduct, then, can be no precedent to us, unless we can shew the same commission, as that under which they acted. .

Thus equipped, they set out upon their wonderful expedition towards Canaan, under Moses as their leader and commander, who brought them out of Egypt with a high hand. The Lord himself effected their deliverance, in remembrance of his Covenant, and in completion of the promise He had made to Abraham*, exactly at the very time foretold, four hundred and thirty years from the first call of that Patriarch†. What an astonishing dispensation was this! It was an event so singular, that there exists not a parallel in all the annals of the world‡. Six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, with a mixed multitude (probably, of Egyptians, who from various motives might attend them), in all, perhaps, three millions of persons, were conducted forth from the midst of another nation, without any means of force, under the immediate guidance and visible protection of Heaven. We need not wonder, that an interposition so extraordinary should be continually adverted to by all the sacred writers, and celebrated with expressions of their warmest praise. We look above Moses, and perceive the exertion of an Almighty power, of which he was only the feeble instrument. Jehovah himself marched, as it were, at the head of this numerous army, to the amazement of the surrounding countries, and to the confusion of all their adversaries. “The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud,

* Gen. xv. 13, 14. † Exod. xii. 41. ‡ Deut. iv. 32.

to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light; to go by day and night*."

The Israelites were directed in their movement, but not by the shortest road to Canaan; and, though they were favoured with constant tokens of the Lord's presence, their trials were not ended, their victory did not appear to be decided. Pharaoh, that perverse and hardened prince, whose terrors had after a while abated, repented of his concessions to Israel, and, before they were out of his dominions, made one desperate effort to subdue or to destroy them†. He pursued them with all the military force of Egypt, and overtook them by the Red sea, in such a situation as seemed to ensure to him the entire conquest. On both sides, it is supposed, were high and impervious mountains, before them the deep waters, and behind them a numerous and well disciplined army. Flight was impossible, and resistance, in them who were in every respect unfitted for war, would have been madness; so that, without the signal interposition of God, they had nothing to expect but immediate destruction from an enraged enemy.

What, then, was their conduct under these perilous circumstances? The whole body of the Israelites were alarmed and terrified. Some cried unto the Lord, but not, we apprehend, with the prayer of faith; whilst others were ready to vent their fury upon Moses, as if He had been the author of all their affliction. They said unto him, "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilder-

* Exod. xiii. 21.

† xiv. 5, &c.

ness?"

ness?" This language was as foolish, as it was sinful. What was Moses, that they should murmur against Him? Had he not acted, throughout, by the divine direction, and, equally with themselves, hazarded every thing that was dear? Had they forgotten what mighty and wonderful works the Lord God had wrought, to rescue them from their bondage? Or, why should they then distrust his care? Nay, had they not before them the visible tokens of his presence, the pillar and the cloud?—Alas! we perceive in them a picture of ourselves. How soon do we lose the remembrance of past deliverances! Every fresh danger awakens our fears, as if we had known nothing of the goodness of the Lord: and, when unbelief prevails, we are blind to the most obvious proofs, that He stands ready to save us.

But was Moses carried away by the same despondency? No: the influence of a strong faith was never more manifest, or exhibited with greater advantage, than upon this occasion. The magnanimity, intrepidity, composure, and meekness of Moses were truly wonderful. Whilst the general voice of that immense multitude was against him, he remained undaunted, and firm as the rock against the dashing of the waves. Though it appeared impossible, that help should be obtained from any creature, he was confident that the Lord God would not forsake them; and he encouraged them to wait in cheerful expectation of His interposition, whilst yet they could not see in what manner it would be effected. "Fear ye not (said he), stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will

shew you to-day: for the Egyptians, whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." This was such an instance of real fortitude, as is scarcely to be paralleled. May we learn from it, in every time of danger, to stay ourselves upon the Lord; and thus, whatever enemies may threaten, we "shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil."

Was the man of God, then, disappointed of his hope? While he was instant in prayer, effectual relief was obtained. "And the Lord said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Alas! what have we to do, to prescribe unto God, when and how he shall save us? Let us leave to him the means of our preservation, and, attending only to the line of our duty, let us "go forward" in his ways.

The appointed signal was given by the Prophet: the rod was stretched out over the waters, which were immediately divided; and the Lord God himself led his people through the deep, as on dry land. The Egyptians still pursued them, through a fatal perverseness, and most desperate hardness of heart. They were, however, separated from the Israelites by the miraculous pillar, which was a cloud of terrible darkness to the former, but to the latter a light of fire to guide and encourage them. When those presumptuous sinners had proceeded into the midst of the sea, they were alarmed and confounded by some unaccountable visions or impressions, so that they could not prosecute their

their march. Convinced at length that the Lord fought for Israel, they began to think of retreating; but they had filled up the measure of their iniquities, and the hand of justice was ready to seize upon them. As soon, then, as the Israelites were safely landed upon the opposite shore, Moses was instructed again to stretch forth his rod, and immediately the waters, which had been a wall of defence to them, buried their enemies, even Pharaoh, and all the strength of Egypt, in the deep.

Infidelity, which is ever studying to limit Omnipotence, will presumptuously ask, "How can these things be?" We pretend not to solve the difficulties, which may be raised by the ignorance or the pride of man. It is enough to say, that the power of God is sufficient to account for this most singular event. We believe it, because He has declared it; nor do we attempt to explain it, but by the miraculous interposition of Jehovah.

Let the Lord alone, then, be exalted! "He doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number*." "Oh, that men would praise Him for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men†!" Well might all the hosts of Israel break forth into the loudest acclamations, and thus express their gratitude; "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea‡."—But the history before us concerns not the Israelites alone: it was written for our admonition. It stands as a monument of the

* Job v. 9.

† Psal. cvii. 8.

‡ Exod. xv. 1, &c.

Lord's power, justice, faithfulness, and love; that his Church in every age may confide in Him, and not fear the proudest, or the most potent of their adversaries. His arm shall protect them, and subdue all their enemies under their feet. The Lord Jehovah says to every one, who is willing to depend on Him, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee*." Be not faithless, then, but believing. He may permit you to be tempted, and driven, as you may apprehend, to the last extremity: but be not dismayed: "stand still, and see the salvation of God." He will "with the temptation make a way for you to escape," though no way seems possible to you. Therefore "hope to the end."

But let not sinners presume. The Lord is patient and long-suffering, even towards those who hate him, as he was towards Pharaoh and the Egyptians: but his arm of justice is stretched out, and it will strike at the last. Deliverance is proposed, reconciliation is obtained by our Lord Jesus Christ: but "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" O let us not provoke his anger, but supplicate his grace; for terrible indeed is the destruction, which awaits the ungodly. May we be found among the true Israel, who are rescued from bondage, and who follow the standard of their glorious Captain; for he leads them forth against all their enemies, "conquering and to conquer!"

* Isa. xliii. 2.

M O S E S.

SECT. III.

Moses, eminent for meekness—fitted for his office—conducted the people—unmoved by their murmurings—smote the rock—overcame the Amalekites—visited by Jethro—relieved by assistants—received the law from Sinai—prayed for the people, who had committed idolatry—again admitted to an interview with God upon the mount—came down with a visible lustre, and veiled his face.*

THE sacred scripture, which “is given by inspiration of God, is profitable,” as for other purposes, so “for instruction in righteousness.” Precepts are delivered, and examples of obedience to those precepts are exhibited, “that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” While we behold, then, the excellency of the saint, we observe what we are required to be.

Perhaps we shall not meet with a more eminent pattern of holiness, in the old testament, than the character we are considering. Though we readily admit, that the piety even of Moses was defective, and that at times he betrayed some remains of a corrupt nature, yet who does not admire, who is not excited to imitate, his contempt of the world, his firm confidence

in

in the divine promise, his ardent zeal, his bold exertions, his unwearied activity in the service of God? In these and other respects we may perceive a peculiar worth and beauty in the life of the Jewish lawgiver; but we are taught to fix our attention on one amiable disposition, for which he was most conspicuous. “The man Moses was very meek above all the men, which were upon the face of the earth*.” And of what unspeakable value and importance is this temper of mind! Let all proper deference be paid to other excellences, which tend to constitute the character of a saint, but an especial regard is due to gentleness and humility. For, not to observe that various benefits will thence be derived to society and to the Church of God, as well as comfort to the possessor, “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price†.”

There are certain circumstances, in which this grace will appear with singular advantage. Lovely as it is in all ranks and situations of life, we praise and esteem it most, in those who are most exalted in the world. For power and dignity have a tendency to cherish pride, and a supercilious contempt of others. When all things, indeed, succeed to our wishes, when every one is disposed to treat us with kindness and respect, it does not seem any high attainment, merely to be preserved from a warmth and vehemence of temper. But to labour under unmerited reproaches, to meet with repeated insults and injuries, from those who are subject to our authority, and whom gratitude for innumerable

* Num. xii. 3.

† 1 Pet. iii. 4.

favours should bind to our interest;—these are trials, which will discover the disposition of our minds. In such circumstances to be calm and undisturbed, and still to pursue the same benevolent purposes towards those from whom we suffer; this conduct is rare, is difficult, and, wherever it is perceived, it demands and even extorts our esteem. This is that grace of the Spirit, for which Moses is so eminently distinguished. And, considering how elevated was his rank, how much he was honoured of God, and yet how various and undeserved were the provocations he received from those, who owed every thing to him, we shall confess that he was indeed “very meek above all the men, which were upon the face of the earth.”

We do not fill up so exalted a station as Moses, we possess not his abilities, we do not meet with such abusive and injurious treatment as he did; but in our dealings with each other, and in our domestic concerns, many cases will occur, which will draw forth what is in our hearts, and will shew whether we are in any measure living under the influence of the same principle, and treading in the steps of Moses. Whatever be the office or relation in which we stand, if we are “the elect of God, holy and beloved,” we are called to “put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering*.”

To return to the history of Moses:—We left him by the shore of the Red sea, surrounded by all the thousands of Israel, celebrating the Lord God in a triumphant song for their singular deliverance, and for the total

* Col. iii. 12.

defeat of Pharaoh and his proud host. And now we prepare to accompany the Leader of this amazing multitude, in his march toward the land of promise. One cannot help pausing in admiration of that very wonderful character and employment which he sustained. He went out of Egypt, at the head of such an army as cannot be paralleled, rude and undisciplined indeed, but numerous as the stars of heaven. Above six hundred thousand men, who were of the military age, followed him; and if to these be added the old and the young, the women, and the mixed company, it will appear probable that the whole body might consist of three millions. All these he had taken and conducted out of the midst of another nation, who were determined to oppose their departure. But with no other weapons, than the rod of God in his hand, he had led them out like a mighty conqueror, while their enemies were utterly confounded, and surrounding kingdoms were held in astonishment.

Rescued, then, from the house of bondage, what had they to fear? What should hinder them from entering immediately into the possession of Canaan, from which, it should seem, they were distant a journey but of a few days? Alas! much remained to be done: the succeeding difficulties of Moses were far greater than any he had before experienced. The Israelites, unfit for war, were gradually to be brought into a state of discipline, and whereas they had before that time no laws or government of their own, they were then to be formed into a church and nation, and both their ecclesiastical and civil polity were to be settled. To accomplish

comply with this, they were not conducted directly to Canaan, but continued in the wilderness for so long a space as forty years; during which period, the care and management of that immense company were intrusted to Moses.

But "who is sufficient for these things?" What strength or wisdom of man shall be competent to such an arduous undertaking? We acknowledge that the hand of God was displayed throughout the whole history; for it exhibits an almost uninterrupted series of miracles. How should that numerous host be supported in an uncultivated desert, but by supplies from heaven? How could that rough and rebellious people be kept in subjection, but by the divine power? Moses, therefore, appeared as God's minister, and not as a mere human governor. With God he maintained familiar converse, received all his directions from Him, consulted Him upon every case of difficulty, and, by an immediate commission from Him, wrought signs and wonders in every stage of their journey.

Possessed of such uncommon abilities, and distinguished by such peculiar honours, we might have supposed he would have been proud, imperious, and oppressive. But he was just the reverse. We might have apprehended, that all the Israelites, struck with reverence and awe, would have held his person and his commands in the highest deference and esteem. This, indeed, they were compelled to do upon some solemn occasions, when the Lord God interposed, and demanded their submission to him at their peril. But,

as we proceed with the narration, we shall find him loaded with the basest reproaches, and opposed with great bitterness; in the midst of all which he continued to exercise an astonishing degree of meekness and forbearance towards them.

It would carry us beyond our proper limits, and be foreign to our design, to dwell on every minute circumstance, which is recorded concerning the pilgrimage of the Israelites in the wilderness. We shall not, therefore, go farther into their history, than as it may serve to display the character of Moses. Their ingratitude, stubbornness, discontent, incredulity, and rebellion, add a lustre to his gentleness and patience. In the former we see a picture of human nature exhibited, from the view of which we should take shame to ourselves, remembering what has been our treatment of the ever-blessed God. In the latter we perceive the powerful influence of divine grace: and from this amiable pattern we turn our eyes to One greater than Moses, the Leader and Commander of all the spiritual Israel, whom He has redeemed from bondage, and is conducting to the heavenly inheritance. If we wonder at the meekness of the Jewish Captain, what shall we say to that of Jesus, who bears with all our perverse tempers, and is not provoked to withdraw his favour from us?

Years before
Christ, 1491.

Under the guidance of the pillar and the cloud, the Hebrews advanced from the shore of the Red sea three days journey into the wilderness, when they began to feel the difficulties of their wandering

dering state. "They found no water*." But at their next stage, their distress was increased. "They could not drink of the waters of Marah; for they were bitter: and the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" This was most strange and inconsistent behaviour indeed. What had Moses done, that he should be blamed? Was he the cause of their calamity? Or why did they look unto him, as if he had been God, and could instantly have given them the supplies they wanted? Painful however as these unjust complaints were to him, he made no reply, but taught them by his example what was the only proper expedient for them all; "he cried unto the Lord," and obtained deliverance. The Lord shewed him a tree, which, being cast into the waters, rendered them sweet.

Not many weeks afterwards, when they came to the desert of Sin, and their bread failed, the whole congregation discovered the same discontented spirit, and, as if they had forgotten all that God had done, and could not believe that He would help them out of their present difficulty, they hastily concluded their case was desperate, and lamented that they had left their servitude in Egypt†. Yet afraid to arraign the conduct of God himself, they instantly charged his immediate instruments with having plotted the scheme on purpose to destroy them: "Ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger." These insulting reproaches were cast upon Moses and Aaron, not by a few seditious persons, but by all that immense multitude together. To silence their com-

* Exod. xv. 22.

† Exod. xvi. 1, &c.

plaints the Lord God himself appeared, and promised to supply them to the full by sending them manna and quails from Heaven, to feed them day by day. But what was the behaviour of Moses on the occasion? He stood undaunted by all their bitter speeches, and boldly, yet with much serenity, reprov'd them for their contempt of God. More anxious to vindicate the divine honour than his own character, he replied, "What are we? Your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord."

It was not long before they were brought into a like difficulty, and were just as impatient, unbelieving, and rebellious, as in the former instances. They came to Rephidim, "and there was no water for the people to drink*." In this necessity, as if they had learnt nothing by their past experience, they rose with great violence against Moses, demanded from him immediate relief, and again imputed to him a design to kill them, their children, and their cattle. Distressed by their unjust and malevolent charges, he betook himself to God in prayer. And whither else should We fly for refuge in every time of trouble? There alone, are support and comfort to be found. "He cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people? They be almost ready to stone me." A most favourable answer was given to his request; deliverance was granted, and an honour put upon the much injured servant of God, even in the presence of his accusers. By the divine direction he smote the rock of Horeb with his potent rod, while the elders of Israel stood by; and

* Exod. xvii. 1, &c.

instantly the water gushed out in plenteous streams, and continued to flow for the full supply of this numerous host, during their long pilgrimage.

Those who are most active and unwearied in their exertions for the advancement of true religion, and for the best interests of their fellow-creatures, ought not to be surprised or discouraged, if their "good be evil spoken of," if their benevolent endeavours be misrepresented and traduced by the very persons, for whose benefit they are labouring. This is to be expected from the perverseness of human nature: but, though every friend forsake them, let them learn "in patience to possess their souls," and cheerfully commit their cause "to Him that judgeth righteously."

Fresh dangers arose. The Amalekites, a warlike people, came against them, and Israel, for the first time, were girded for the battle. Joshua led forth the armed band; whilst Moses, not less active or less useful, stood upon a mount, with his rod lifted up for their encouragement, and his hands stretched out in fervent prayer for their success. The very man, whom they had reproached, and accused of a design to murder them, appeared as their advocate before God, nor ceased from his most importunate intercessions for them, though wearied and exhausted, till he had prevailed, and the victory was obtained. What an instance of exalted piety is this! As if all remembrance of the repeated provocations he had received from them were obliterated, he fought nothing more earnestly than their salvation. Shall we not learn from him, to forget all our injuries, "to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us,"

us," and, in opposition to all their unkindness, to labour incessantly for their good?—Nor let true religion be thought an useless thing to the state. Many may be unfit for serving their country in the field, who may yet promote its advantage in their closets, and by their influence at the throne of grace may be the strongest bulwark of the land. Had we more persons among us endued with the pious fervour of Moses, to hold up their hands to God on behalf of the nation, we should have less reason to fear the most formidable adversaries.

The praise of the conquest, thus gained by prayer, was devoutly ascribed to God, and an altar, commemorative of the event, was reared, and inscribed to JEHOVAH-NISSI, "The Lord my Banner."—It is this God, who has helped us against the assaults of our enemies, and fought our battles for us. Let not the great deliverances, He has wrought for us, be overlooked, but the glory be given to his name. These also should be considered as a favourable token in time to come; and therefore, if fresh attacks are made upon us, we should not hesitate to go forth under THE LORD OUR BANNER.

In the same amiable light the man of God appears in the next transaction, where he is described as attending to his own domestic concerns. It is no discredit to the abilities of the most accomplished statesman, nor any reflection upon the piety of the most eminent saint, that he is free of access to all, and neglects not the necessary avocations of private life. The Israelites, by the guidance of Heaven, were conducted
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into the neighbourhood of that very land, where Moses had spent forty years in the humble station of a shepherd. The report of all the wonders, which had been wrought in Egypt for the deliverance of Israel, had reached Midian, and gladdened the heart of Jethro, who went out, therefore, with joy to congratulate his honoured son-in-law*. The family of Moses, his wife and two children, had been sent thither for protection, during his unsettled and dangerous condition, while he had to contend with Pharaoh. But upon this occasion they were brought, under the care of Jethro, to the camp of Israel, and received again to the society of the affectionate husband and the pious father. The interview between Moses and Jethro pleases and instructs us. We perceive in them both, not only the tender feelings of friendship, but fervent gratitude and love to God, while the late astonishing display of the divine power and goodness, in behalf of Israel, was the delightful subject of their conversation. This was more than a common social meeting: they joined together in worship, to testify their devout acknowledgment of what God had done: the priest of Midian, according to his office, presented sacrifices to the Lord, and all the Jewish elders partook with them of their entertainment, or rather of their religious service. How rare is such intercourse as this! And yet only those visits, in which God is honoured, yield any true satisfaction or advantage.

Moses neglected not his domestic affairs; but other concerns soon required his attention. Nor should

* Exod. xviii. 1, &c.

those persons, who fill a public station, consider their time as entirely at their own disposal. Various relations have a claim upon them; and, though one duty be discharged, another is not thereby superseded.

Moses was called to preside as the chief magistrate or judge in all the controversies among the people. The employment, which was laborious, left him but little leisure, and seemed likely to wear away his strength. By the prudent advice, therefore, of Jethro, assistants were appointed for him in his work, and none but the more difficult causes were reserved for his determination.—There are those, perhaps, in our own days, who, with a zeal like that of Moses, would “very gladly spend and be spent” in the service of God and his Church; and it would ill become us to damp their ardour. But let them hearken to the wise counsel of Jethro, which the Jewish leader did not disdain to follow; and, even with a view to their greater usefulness, let them maintain a necessary regard to their own health.

We hasten to a more important transaction, to the exhibition of a scene the most awful and tremendous, that had ever been displayed upon the earth. Moses, having taken leave of his father-in-law, was called up to meet the Lord himself upon mount Sinai, where he appeared as the Mediator between God and the people; an illustrious type of Him, who has declared the divine will unto us, and is gone into heaven, as our representative, to speak in our behalf, and to order our concerns for us.

The Israelites had come out of Egypt as a company of undisciplined slaves, and were not yet formed into any regular society. To curb their licentious spirit, and to render them a powerful and prosperous nation, it was indispensably requisite that some mode of government should be established among them, and laws enacted for the regulation of their conduct. But who could undertake the arduous task? We say not that the abilities of Moses were incompetent for the purpose. But, whatever his talents were, he was not influenced by the ambitious views of human politicians, nor did he seek any honour or authority for himself. He acted, throughout the whole business, only as the agent of God, from whom he received his directions, and who reserved in his own hands the settlement of all their affairs. For it was the divine counsel to separate this people from all others, and to distinguish them by such appointments and ordinances, as no legislator among men would or could have contrived.

When, therefore, they came to Sinai, a solemn pause was made for a whole year; and the mount, by which they encamped, was rendered most memorable by the visions and revelations of the Lord upon it*. Moses was summoned; and by him a message was sent to the Israelites, requiring them to enter into a compact with Jehovah. It was proposed, on the part of God, that He would be their chief Magistrate, their Lawgiver, and their King; and from them was exacted a promise of unfeigned subjection and obedience. Under

* Exod. xix. i, &c.

this peculiar covenant they were to be incorporated as a nation; and it was stipulated, that, while they continued faithful to the engagement, the Lord would secure to them the possession of Canaan, and favour them with abundant privileges and prosperity. The nature of the divine administration was to be further opened to them by the promulgation of those statutes, to which their submission was expected. But that the commands of such a Legislator might not be slighted, every circumstance in the delivery of the law was so ordered, as to leave upon their minds an awful impression of the majesty, the purity, and the justice of their supreme and Almighty Governor.* It was also intended throughout this amazing transaction, to put a distinguished honour upon Moses, as God's immediate minister, that they might never afterwards question his authority, or reject his precepts.

For this grand display of the glory of their Sovereign, and for the ratification of the covenant between the righteous God and his polluted creatures, preparations were made three days before. When the appointed time was come, the Lord God gave the summons, and cited them, as it were, to his tribunal. "There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the nether part of the mount. And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke

smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice."

Well indeed may we cry out, "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" Even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake*." But we are warned of a still more tremendous display of the glorious majesty of our God; when not Sinai only, but the whole earth shall be on fire, and when also not the Jewish nation alone, but the universal race of mankind shall be assembled before him. *But "who may abide the day of his coming?" For "he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty Angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ†."

Yet while the people were kept at a profound distance, and forbidden to gaze, or to speculate with idle curiosity upon the august appearance, Moses was admitted to a nearer view, we had almost said, to a familiar intercourse with the Deity. And herein he prefigured the Saviour ascending up on high, and approaching unto God for us. Those also, who are reconciled to God, may, notwithstanding the tremendous denunciations of his wrath, look up with joy, and have access into his presence with a holy boldness.

In the audience, then, of the whole congregation, the Lord God spake, and with a mighty voice proclaimed his own law‡. They saw not any similitude,

* Heb. xii. 21. † 2 Thess. i. 7, 8. ‡ Exod. xx, 1, &c.

but they heard distinctly the words which he uttered, while he published the ten commandments, prohibiting every unholy thought and temper, and requiring the continual exercise of every good principle and affection. Precepts so extensive and so spiritual, and delivered with such circumstances of terror, which denoted the awful consequences of transgression, could not but alarm them. “ They removed and stood afar off;” under an apprehension, doubtless, of their guilt and danger. They felt their need of a mediator, and requested Moses to sustain this office for them.—And will not a knowledge of what God is, and of that obedience which He demands, make us also tremble for ourselves, and cry unto him, who is our Advocate on high, to undertake for us? Every moral injunction, laid upon the Jews, is equally binding upon us; nor do we understand the nature, worth, and excellency of the Gospel Salvation, unless our fears have been awakened by the denunciations of mount Sinai.

“ Moses drew near unto the thick darkness, where God was,” and there received from Him more particular directions for the government of the people*. To all the terms of this their national covenant they testified their full consent, and the compact was ratified between the parties, by the offering of sacrifices, and the sprinkling of blood†. A more clear and glorious display of the divine majesty was then vouchsafed to Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, who saw some wonderful re-

* Exod, xxi—xxiii.

† xxiv. 3, &c.

presentation of God (which might be intended to denote the incarnation of the Redeemer) and did eat and drink in his presence. But Moses alone ascended to the summit of the mountain, into the very cloud, which, like devouring fire, covered the hill; and he was there in private conference with the Lord God Almighty, forty days and forty nights. There he subsisted without any bodily nourishment; while he was instructed in what manner their civil affairs should be regulated, and the sacred service, in all the different ordinances, conducted*. At the close of the interview, the precepts of the moral law were delivered to him, written by the finger of God upon two tables of stone; which was a token of their peculiar excellency, and was designed to be a standing proof to the people, that they were under the immediate government of Heaven.

Do we look with envy at the honour bestowed upon Moses, because he was admitted to such familiar communications with the Godhead? But, through faith in our atoning sacrifice, we hope for a greater honour than this holy man ever enjoyed upon earth. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is†." "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face‡." Nor will this beatific vision of God be interrupted, like that of Moses on the mount. It will continue with equal, if not with in-

* Exod. xxv—xxxj.

† 1 John iii. 2.

‡ 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

creasing, brightness and joy, not for a few days only, but through a boundless eternity.

The divine legation of the prophet had been confirmed with abundant evidence; but still the murmurings of the people were not silenced. While he was yet in the mount with God, they rejected his authority and sought another leader. "Up (said they), make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him*." This was an instance of most insolent contempt, towards Jehovah himself, as well as towards Moses. The Lord, therefore, in righteous indignation proposed to destroy them immediately. But the hands of Omnipotence are stayed by the prayers of a holy man: and accordingly He requested of his faithful servant, who was interceding for them, that He might be permitted to execute his fierce anger upon them: "Let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation." Had Moses, then, cherished any revengeful spirit for their injurious treatment of him; or had he entertained any ambitious designs for himself; he would readily have acceded to the scheme, and rejoiced in it as the wish of his heart. But, actuated by that love, which "is not easily provoked, and which seeketh not her own," he poured out his soul in most importunate petitions for them, intreating God, for the glory of His name, and by all the promises which He had given to their fathers, not to withdraw his favour from them. What will not prayer effect?

* Exod. xxxii. 1, &c.

The people were spared at the mediation of the very man, whom they had thrust from them.

But the painful task of reproof and punishing them remained for him; and for this purpose his communications with God upon the mount, concerning the establishment of their government, were a while interrupted. He was sent down to take cognizance of their sin: though he had appeared before God as their intercessor, he was commissioned to call them to account, as their judge, "the Minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon the evil doer." He saw their idolatry with a mixture of grief and indignation, and discovered a warmth of temper, which might seem to exceed the proper bounds. It seldom happens, indeed, that a corrupt nature does not infuse a degree of bitterness into the purest zeal; yet we dare not censure his conduct on this occasion, but consider him as acting by God's direction, and not by the impulse of passion or revenge. It was the divine glory, and not his own private interest, for which he was concerned, and the steps, which he took, were evidently designed to express the strongest detestation of their offence, and to convince them of its awful consequences.

The two tables, on which the moral law was engraved by the finger of God, and which were a token of the covenant between Him and the people, Moses cast upon the ground and brake before their eyes; as an intimation that they had broken the contract, and had no benefits to expect from that quarter. The golden calf, which they had made, he commanded

commanded to be reduced to ashes and mixed with water, which they were compelled to drink: and thus their sin itself became their punishment; “the backsliders in heart were filled with their own ways.” Aaron was sharply reproved for the cowardly part he had acted in complying with their desires, and, had not Moses intreated for him, he would have been destroyed, as a monument of God’s righteous indignation*.

This was not all: it was necessary that the guilty should be punished; and therefore Moses stood as the representative of Heaven, to maintain the authority of the law, and to inflict the penalty. That it might be known, who retained their allegiance most firmly, and who were most ready to shew their zeal in opposition to the transgressors, he cried aloud, “Who is on the Lord’s side?” This called forth the Levites, who immediately declared their steadfastness in the Lord’s service; and to them was committed the painful task of executing vengeance on their idolatrous brethren. Accordingly, on that very day three thousand men were slain by the hand of justice.—Is this condemned as an act of cruelty? Let it be remembered, that Moses had to assert the honour of the government, as a wise and faithful magistrate; and in such a case, to have granted a general impunity would have been a breach of his trust. But we are not concerned to vindicate Moses: the punishment was of God’s appointment: the command was delivered with——

* Deut. ix. 20.

“ Thus saith the Lord God of Israel :” and “ who art thou that repliest against Him ?”

The whole history will prove, that Moses was actuated by the steadiest attachment to the interests of the people, and by the warmest affection for them, notwithstanding their contemptuous opposition to him. Witness his continued and very fervent petitions to God for their pardon. It seemed extremely uncertain, whether even the Israelites, who remained, could be forgiven; but, as if all his happiness were bound up in their's, he exerted his utmost influence for them with God, intreating that they might find mercy, or that he himself might no longer be written among the living. Intimations of returning favour were given in answer to his importunate request; but a full reconciliation was not yet effected; and it appeared as if they would be reserved only to some future day of retribution. What an awful breach is occasioned by a departure from God! It is not easily to be repaired.

But while we deplore the consequences of their rebellion, we see an additional lustre put upon the character of the Prophet: his zeal, his love, his ardour in prayer, shine the brighter. We stand in admiration of that uncommon intimacy and freedom, with which he approached to the God of heaven. Sometimes he was the mouth of God to the people, to instruct, and to reprove; at other times he was the mouth of the people to God, to deprecate his wrath, and implore his gracious presence amongst them. He was sent with a message to the Israelites, declaring the
Lord's

Lord's heaviest displeasure against them for their repeated provocations, and his determination to withdraw from them those peculiar manifestations of his favour, which they had hitherto enjoyed*: and in token thereof the tabernacle was removed to a distance from the camp. Yet God did not utterly depart: every sincere worshipper still had access to him in the holy place; and Moses, in particular, was admitted to converse with him, as it were face to face. This intercourse he improved for the purpose of procuring a full pardon to the people, and a renewal of their former privileges. By one argument after another, he besought the Lord to return to them in mercy, and would take no denial. At length he obtained that gracious promise for himself, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." But a promise for himself was not all he wanted: he could not be satisfied, till he was assured that the whole nation were received again under the divine conduct and protection. It was a bold request; and yet it was instantly granted. "I will do this thing also," said the Lord. Then the breach was repaired, and a perfect reconciliation effected. Will not this encourage our application to the throne of grace, both for ourselves and others? For what difficulty is there, which prayer will not remove? What blessing, which it will not procure?

The success of one petition gave him confidence to prefer another: but, it should seem, his familiarity with God induced him to ask too much; more than

* Exod. xxxiii. 1, &c.

was suitable, yea, more than was possible. From an earnest desire to gain further discoveries of the supreme Majesty of heaven, he said, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Under certain limitations the request would be highly proper from every one of us. We are all concerned to obtain the manifestation of God in the Redeemer, not indeed by any visible display, but by a spiritual revelation of his perfections; for this is that light, which "shineth in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ*." But a vain curiosity may lead even good men, like Moses, to seek information of that, which is wisely and mercifully concealed from us. Let us be thankful for that small portion of knowledge concerning the nature of God, which he is pleased to communicate, and wait for that day, when "we shall see him as he is." It is not only in displeasure for our sinfulness, but in compassion to our infirmities, that "He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth his cloud upon it†."

Was the petition, then, rejected as presumptuous? He was given to understand, that it could not be granted in the full extent; for no man, in his present state, could endure the sight of unveiled Deity; the most holy person would be overpowered by the splendour. And perhaps many things, which we arrogantly enquire after, may be hidden from us for this very reason, because our faculties cannot comprehend them. But his desire was gratified, as far at least as he was able to bear it. The Lord promised to make

* 2 Cor. iv. 6.

† Job xxvi. 9.

all His goodness pass before him, and to proclaim his own gracious name; at the same time declaring his sovereign mercy, and his determination to pardon and to save, according to the counsel of his own will. But the brightness of the divine majesty was more than Moses could behold: and therefore, while only a glimpse of it was vouchsafed to him, he was sheltered from the dazzling effulgence, in a cleft of the rock, by the hand of God himself.—Alas! “who shall stand, when He appeareth?” May we not say to every unhumbled sinner, in expectation of a much more tremendous sight than that upon mount Sinai, “Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty *?”

Moses, then, according to the divine summons, went up again to the summit of the mountain, and carried with him two tables of stone, on which the commandments were to be renewed †. There the Lord condescended to meet him with some visible tokens of his presence, and, in answer to his supplication, discovered to him more of the splendour of the Godhead, than he had ever seen before. Jehovah himself, with most awful solemnity, proclaimed his own perfections by an audible voice; asserting, particularly, his sovereign authority, the riches of his grace, and the terrors of his justice: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers

* Isa. ii. 10.

† Exod. xxxiv. 1, &c.

upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and to the fourth generation."

When the most high God approaches to man, though it be in the manifestation of his love, there is enough to strike a guilty creature with awe. Even Moses was constrained to feel his infinite distance; so that, under an impression of the deepest reverence, "he made haste, and bowed his head, and worshipped." What a change must take place in our whole frame, before we can bear to stand, with unveiled faces, in the immediate presence of God, around the throne of his glory!

The repeated declarations of mercy encouraged Moses to lift up his prayer again on behalf of the people. He requested, therefore, that, as far as he had found acceptance, he might prevail also for his offending brethren, and that, notwithstanding all their perverseness, they might be forgiven, acknowledged for the Lord's inheritance, and favoured with His gracious residence in the midst of them. What disinterested love was this! Fit emblem of the mediation, which is carried on in heaven by our great High-priest. Thus He prays for us, and therefore we are not cast off, as we deserve, for our numerous provocations.—The same petition had been offered up already, and "an answer of peace" had been given. But the example of Moses teaches us to renew our applications for pardoning mercy, that we may receive fresh and stronger assurances of it. Accordingly, the Lord God vouchsafed to ratify his covenant, and repeat his promises to them.

The door of communication being thus opened again, the interview upon the mount was continued as before, for forty days, and forty nights; during which time the Jewish leader was instructed in the most minute particulars for the government of the people, and then sent down with the law of God in his hand, written upon the two tables of stone. He also carried with him a further proof of his commission. His countenance shone with a bright lustre, partaking, as it were, of that effulgence of the Deity, which he had been permitted to see. But, whilst he drew near to the congregation with such evident marks of being an immediate messenger from heaven, they were afraid to approach him, till he had put a veil upon his face. And this veil, it should seem, he constantly wore, except in the tabernacle during his intercourse with God, before whom the highest splendour of a creature is utterly obscured. Every time therefore, they looked upon him, they were reminded of that supreme authority, by which he spoke and acted: but while "they could not steadfastly behold his face, for the glory of his countenance," they were likewise reminded, that the dispensation committed to them must for a season remain comparatively dark, concealed in types and shadows, so that they could not clearly see the end. We rejoice, that the veil is taken away under the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "The darkness is past, and the true light now shineth." But we should also remember, that we must walk in a holy fellowship with God, if we would partake in any measure of the light of his countenance. While we converse with him,

him, we shall become like him, and others will soon perceive “the beauty of holiness” in our life and conversation. “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord *.”

From Moses we turn our attention to the much more eminent Personage, who, when transfigured on the mount, shone with a brightness above that of the meridian sun †: and here we confess, that Moses “had no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth.” We triumph in the expectation, that all his people will shortly be adorned with the same heavenly radiance: for “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory ‡.”

* 2 Cor. iii. 18. † Matt. xvii. 2. ‡ Col. iii. 4.

M O S E S.

SECT. 4.

Moses delivered the ordinances—departed from Sinai—discouraged—reproved for his unbelief—reproached by Aaron and Miriam—distressed by the report of the spies—opposed by Korah—sinned, when he smote the rock for water—saw Aaron die—erected the brazen serpent—subdued various enemies—vindicated in his conduct, as a magistrate—distressed about his death—desired a successor—laboured to the last—prophefied of Christ—died—buried—a pattern to ministers—a type of Christ.

THE man of God, whose character is before us, was favoured with divine communications, as we have seen, in a most astonishing degree. We left him coming down from the mount, with the law of Heaven in his hands and a miraculous lustre shining in his countenance. We are now to observe him returning to his charge, and immediately appointing all the ordinances of the sacred service, according to the commands he had received, and the pattern shewed to him, on the hill of Sinai*.

Suffice it upon this subject to say, that “ he was faithful in all his house, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after†.” The rites and

* Exod. xxxv.—xl.

† Heb. iii. 5.

cereemonies were such as could not be of man's contrivance: and yet, if not considered with a reference to the Gospel, they seem trifling and burdensome. But the design of them is expressly declared. We have the substance of those good things of which the Israelites had only the shadow: for the whole of their ministration "was a figure for the time then present," and, having answered its end, it is now abolished. That one sacrifice, which alone can "purge the conscience from dead works," being offered, there is no longer any need of the blood of bulls and goats, which could never "take away sins," and which was chiefly valuable, as representing the blood of the Son of God.

Years before
Christ, 1490.

At length the signal was given for their departure from Sinai, when all the institutions both in church and state were fully settled. In the second month of the second year, the cloud rose up from the tabernacle, and directed their march into the desert of Paran*. But they had not advanced far, before their former* discontented spirit returned upon them, and brought them into fresh troubles. At Taberah the fire of God consumed many of the company for the sin of murmuring†. And there again we behold their leader in the character of an intercessor. He stood in the gap, and, by the prevalency of his mediation, the fire was quenched, and Israel was spared.

The same, or rather greater, difficulties awaited him in their progress through the wilderness. He had

* Num. x. 11. Deut. i. 6. † Numb. xi. 1, &c.

continual occasion for the exercise of all the meekness and patience he possessed: and we wonder not, that, by the repeated clamours raised against him, he was wearied, and disposed to complain of the weight of his burden. The people appeared to have received but little advantage from all their past experience; for they were afterwards as peevish and petulant as ever. With extreme ingratitude and presumption they loathed the manna, which God provided for their daily sustenance, and “required meat for their lust*.” This was distressing to Moses; and we fear that his mind was very improperly disturbed. In the anguish of his soul he lamented before God the peculiar hardships of his situation; and it should seem, that, for the time, he was more jealous of his own authority, than of the honour of God. As if he could no longer bear up against all their perverseness, he besought the Lord to interpose for his assistance, or instantly to take from him the life which was become so very afflictive.—Do we wonder at such language as this from Moses? It were easy to point out many things evidently wrong, in his address to God. But perhaps we are unfit judges, as not being aware of the greatness of his provocations. And when we attend to our own danger, instead of severely censuring him, we shall rather pray, “Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not†.”

The Lord had compassion upon the infirmities of his servant, and in order to relieve him in the toil of government, appointed seventy elders, whom also he

* Psal. lxxviii. 18. &c.

† Psal. xvii. 5.

qualified by his Spirit, to form a judicial court. This institution is said to have been the foundation of the Jewish Sanhedrim, which was afterward the principal seat of judgment. One circumstance is mentioned, which places the character of Moses in an amiable light. Two of the persons, who were thus set apart by God, were detained in the camp: but even there the divine inspiration pointed them out, and they prophesied separately from the rest. This was thought irregular, or an encroachment upon the authority of Moses, who was therefore advised to restrain them. But being far removed from that proud, malignant temper, which considers itself injured by the attainments of another, and rejoicing to observe the work of God promoted though not by himself, he cried out, "Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them."—Is there the same disinterested generosity in all those, who excel in spiritual gifts? Is there no fear of losing credit, because others are coming into estimation? Or are we, like Moses, glad to hear that useful men are raised up in the Church, who may probably obscure our reputation? And do we wish them prosperity in the name of the Lord?

The desire of the people also was gratified, but it was in righteous displeasure; for the very thing, they had longed for, became the means of their punishment. The Lord said he would grant them their request, and send them meat to the full. A similar miracle had been wrought for them before, and many others

equally surprising had been performed in the sight of Moses, and yet, upon its being intimated to him, he seemed to doubt the possibility of it, and replied, that the providing of flesh for such an immense multitude was too much to be expected. He was therefore reproved for his unbelief, because he had limited the holy One of Israel: "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?"—When we call in question the promises of God, because we know not how they can be performed, what do we, but discover our own ignorance and presumption? Let it suffice, as an answer to all our difficulties about the ways and designs of God, that He is God, and not man.—The word was accomplished: "He rained flesh upon them as the dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire: they were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat was yet in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them, and slew the fattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel*."

The patience of Moses was likewise tried in his own family. An objection was brought against him from a quarter, where we should have least expected it. His own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, both persons of real holiness, took up a quarrel against him. The pretence was, that he had married a wife of a foreign extraction: but, probably, the true reason was, their pride was hurt, and their envy excited, by his superior authority in the govern-

* Psa. lxxviii. 27—31.

ment of the people. They said, therefore, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not spoken also by us*?"—An opposition from our near relations, and from religious friends, is of all others most painful. But even this is to be looked for: and it will be well, if in such circumstances we can preserve the gentleness of Moses.

He replied not; he seems not to have noted it. He was ever ready to plead the cause of God, when it was attacked; but upon this occasion he was regardless of his own honour; and therefore it is remarked as a striking evidence of his unparalleled meekness. But the Lord himself repented the groundless reproaches cast upon his servant: and when We are satisfied to leave the vindication of our character with Him, He will interpose, and bring our adversaries to shame. He summoned the offenders to appear before him, established the authority of Moses, in the most indisputable manner, and declared his hot displeasure against them. Miriam was instantly struck with a leprosy; and Aaron was made to tremble under a sense of his guilt. Then they confessed their folly, and with deep submission sought relief from the very man, whom they had basely slandered. This also gave him a fresh opportunity to exercise his gentle and loving spirit. He wished not to revenge himself; nay, as a proof of his entire forgiveness, he prayed that the stroke of justice might be removed from his sister. He cried unto the Lord, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee:" and,

* Num. xii. 1, &c.

at his mediation, the offence was pardoned. We need not add surely, that We also are under the strongest obligations “not to render evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; for we are thereunto called, that we should inherit a blessing*.”

Let us observe the same meekness of temper in another instance. The spies, who had been sent to view the promised land, brought back a most unfavourable account of it. Immediately the people were discouraged, even to despondency; they considered themselves as devoted to destruction, complained that they had been led out of Egypt, and determined to choose a captain for themselves, that they might return thither†. This was a direct attack, not upon Moses only, but upon God himself. It was, therefore, the cause of extreme distress to this holy man, who was deeply affected, not so much by their opposition to him, as by their avowed rejection of God. He fell upon his face before them, intreating them to desist from their mad schemes, and offering up his importunate cries to Heaven for them. Then the Lord interposed to confound the rebels, and threatened to destroy them, as if he were weary with forbearing: and, in their stead, he promised to make of Moses a greater and mightier nation than they. The same proposal the Jewish leader had refused before, though it was so flattering to himself; and still, as far from ambition or revenge as ever, he desired not his own advancement, or their ruin, but again most fervently pleaded for their forgiveness. He besought the Lord, not to suffer his own

* 1 Pet. iii. 9.

† Num. xiv. 1, &c.

glorious name to be dishonoured, but to display the abundance of his mercy, and therefore to pardon the iniquity of the people. How effectual is the prayer of a righteous man! The whole race of Israel were rescued from immediate destruction, though, for their sin upon this occasion, they were doomed to wander, and to fall in the wilderness, and their children only were reserved for the possession of Canaan.

Moses continued to experience the same trials throughout their pilgrimage. In one of their encampments, a most formidable rebellion was raised against him, not by a few insignificant persons, but by two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, because they could not brook submission to his authority*. This, however, like all the other oppositions made against him, tended only to confirm his commission, and to put fresh honour upon him. Did he then defend himself by force? No; his constant appeal was, not to arms, but to the righteous judgment of Heaven. He fell on his face, betaking himself to prayer in the first place, for direction and assistance; then he very meekly reasoned with the leaders of the faction, and referred the matter to the decision of God, not doubting but that He would manifest his integrity, and refute their base accusations. Nor was he disappointed; for, while they were all solemnly assembled, awaiting the issue, the Lord appeared in his glory, and threatened to destroy them in a moment. The sentence, indeed, was mitigated through the mediation of Moses. But it was still expedient, that vengeance should be taken,

* Num. xvi. 1, &c.

and the offenders punished. The design was revealed to the Prophet, who therefore rested the credit of his mission upon this one point, that the ground would open, and instantly swallow up alive their rebellious company; which accordingly came to pass.

Shall we hear any more, then, of their objections to the messenger of Heaven? Alas! the rest, who were spared, betrayed the same spirit; and, what was most awful indeed, whilst the cries of those, who perished in so miserable a manner, were fresh in their ears, and the devouring earth had scarcely closed its mouth, on the very next day all the congregation of the Israelites arose up in fierce contention against Moses and Aaron, and cast upon them the blame of the tremendous devastation, which had been made. Can any instance be given of a greater obstinacy and hardness of heart? God was provoked, and his wrath poured upon them, Fourteen thousand and seven hundred were consumed by the plague; and those, who were left, escaped the calamity, only by the earnest intercessions of the very persons, whom they had reproached as murderers.

Years before
Christ, 1453.

The Israelites had been doomed to wander in the wilderness for forty years, during all which time the faith and patience of Moses were continually exercised by the perverseness of the people. But little is told us of their transactions from the second to the fortieth year, except their different removals from one encampment to another. We are grieved, however, to find the same spirit of murmuring and unbelief, at the last as in the first part of their pilgrimage. When they came to Kadesh, the water, with
which

which probably they had till then been well supplied from the rock at Rephidim, entirely failed: and instantly their fears were excited*. They complained aloud, as if their case were worse than if they had been swallowed up alive by the earth, or consumed by fire from heaven. Moses was the object of their resentment: they imputed all their distress to him, and rose up as in rebellion against him. Whither, then, did he betake himself for protection? Here again, as he had done before, from the violence of men he fled to the sanctuary of his God. In every difficulty, prayer was his constant resource: and thus it appeared throughout, that the administration of the government rested not upon the wisdom, strength, or popularity of Moses, but upon the power of God, immediately and continually exerted for that purpose.

Relief was obtained. While he lay prostrate before God, asking counsel for himself, and intreating mercy for the people, he was commanded to take his rod, assemble the congregation, and speak to the rock in their presence: and he was assured that thereupon the water should gush out from the flinty stone, as upon a former occasion, for the abundant supply of all their necessities. He obeyed the divine injunction, and instantly the streams flowed out for their refreshment.

But what is this that we hear? The indignation of God is kindled, not against the murmuring Israelites, as we might have apprehended, but against the two leaders, Moses and Aaron; and sentence is pronounced upon them, that they shall die in the wilderness. What

* Num. xx. 1, &c.

have they done? Here was some grievous offence committed, because the Lord himself condemned and punished them; but perhaps it is not easy to determine, from the short account given us, what was the particular nature of the crime. We have beheld this eminent pattern of holiness persevering through uncommon difficulties: and did he fail at the last? We are constrained to acknowledge, that a foul blot is left upon his character; enough to humble our pride, and to prove that perfection is no where to be found.

It should seem, that, while he was obeying the command of God, he was under the influence of some improper tempers; and therefore, the state of his mind being wrong, the action performed could not be right. We apprehend, that his sin might arise from a secret indulgence of pride, unbelief, or resentment; or it might be a compound of them all together. Whatever it was, probably it was sudden, and momentary, at the time when he struck the rock twice, and said, "Ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?"—We should not wonder, if one, so distinguished by his rank, his abilities, and usefulness, was lifted up, for the instant, by a conceit of his own superiority, and forgetting his dependence, said, "Must We do this for you?" We are expressly told, that in some way or other his faith failed him: either he did not expect the performance of the miracle from God, or he did not give the glory of it to Him, as he ought to have done. For thus the Lord reproved him, "Ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes
of

of the children of Israel.”—It is also most certain, that there was some stirring of anger in his heart, and that he was carried away, for the moment at least, by a heat of temper. Wearied out with their injurious treatment for nearly forty years, he spake and acted in a warmth of passion; and hence, probably, he struck the rock TWICE, and called them REBELS. So the Psalmist asserts, “ They provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips*.”

We pretend not to justify his conduct; yet it deserves our most serious consideration, that the offence was of such a sort, that we might not have perceived in it any thing very blamable. But we have to do with a righteous God, who “ searcheth the heart,” who condemns an evil thought or affection, and “ desires truth in the inward parts.”—And, while we observe Moses so sharply censured for this one action, we are ready to cry out, “ Who shall stand before this holy Lord God?” Surely there is a greater malignity in sin, than we are aware of. Shall we dare to say, It is a light thing: or, Where can be the harm of it? Should our God “ be extreme to mark what is done amiss, who may abide it?” Instead of inveighing against Moses, it will become us to take shame to ourselves. What attention do we pay to the words of our mouths, and to the tempers of our minds? Are we circumspect in all things, and that continually? Are we meek and patient, loving and forbearing to the most injurious? Where is the perfect man, whose heart never admits any unholy affection, or whose tongue has

* Psal. cvi. 33.

never spoken unadvisedly? Verily “in many things we offend all*.”

But let not the subject be abused. Some appear to derive an improper kind of encouragement from the infirmities and declensions of saints. Many profane sinners dwell upon them with delight, and, in excuse for their own vile conduct, allege, that the best of men have had their failings. There are also careless professors of religion, who constantly dishonour the doctrine of God our Saviour by their evil practices or dispositions, and yet presumptuously conclude, that their case is no worse than that of the most excellent persons, who have fallen as well as they. It is obvious, that these are most dangerous ways of perverting the scriptures. Do we perceive any thing in the example of Moses to justify the habitual commission of the least iniquity? No: it remains an awful truth, “He who committeth sin” (so as to allow it in the general tenour of his life) “is of the Devil †.”

One effect of the transgression appeared at the very next stage of their journey.* Moses was commanded to attend his brother Aaron to the top of mount Hor, there to take a solemn leave of him, and to see him die for the very offence, in which he himself had been principally concerned. This was, doubtless, a distressing appointment, not merely on account of the loss he sustained in the sudden removal of his dear partner and assistant in his labours, but especially as reminding him of his own guilt, and of that dissolution which he also was shortly to experience.

* James iii. 2.

† 1 John iii. 8.

As they advanced in their marches, the people were discouraged by the length and difficulties of the way, and again they fell into their old sin of murmuring*. They levelled their complaints, as before, against Moses; but the heavy judgments of God soon brought them to bow at his feet. Fiery serpents were commissioned to destroy them, and many were consumed in their iniquity. The rest, being awed and terrified, confessed their crime, and intreated Him, whom they had reproached, to become their intercessor. He saw and pitied their distress, and, not bearing the least resentment for all their hard speeches against him, he prayed for them, and obtained deliverance. The remedy, provided for the bite of the serpents, was not only miraculous, but singular in its kind, and designed to be a most instructive emblem to the Church in future ages. We ought not to forget, that sin, more poisonous and destructive to the soul than the venom of the serpent to the body, has spread its baleful influence through the whole race of mankind. But the power and grace of our God are displayed in the removal of this malady; and by a mode similar to that whereby the Israelites were restored. For "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so was the son of man lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life†."

Moses was forbidden to enter into Canaan, but he saw the promises of God, in part at least, fulfilled to Israel by their conquest of various enemies. At length they were brought out of the wilderness, and led forth

* Num. xxi. 4, &c.

† John iii. 14, 15.

to battle against the Amorites, Moabites, and Midianites, whom they utterly subdued, and whose land they took for their own possession. Thus the Lord God honoured his faithful servant, by giving him to behold the beginning of that glorious work, which was afterwards completed under Joshua.

His troubles, indeed, were not yet ended. His heart was pained by a most awful defection in the people, who were seduced by the daughters of Moab to commit whoredom and idolatry*. This was effected through the wicked counsel of Balaam, and was more fatal to Israel than the opposition of their strongest adversaries. On that occasion we observe Moses acting with all the vigour necessary to the character of an upright magistrate. For, in order to stop the progress of the sin, he commanded the principal leaders in it to be punished with immediate death. Nor should this be considered as at all inconsistent with his usual meekness, since he proceeded only according to the divine injunction; and therefore lenity to the guilty, and a refusal to execute the sentence upon them, would have been disobedience to the supreme Governor.

In some other instances, his conduct might have the appearance of harshness and severity, as when he required the Midianitish women to be slain†; and again, when he opposed the petition of the Reubenites and Gadites to be settled before their brethren‡. But in these and such like cases, it is obvious, that the measures he adopted were regulated, not by a spirit of re-

* Num. xxv. 1, &c.

† xxxi. 1, &c.

‡ xxxii. 1, &c.

sentment,

sentment, or any selfish motives, but by a regard to the will and the glory of God, and to the general interests of the people. We should not be forward to censure, where we are not so far acquainted with the various circumstances of an action, as to be competent to decide upon it; and it will be allowed surely, that what would be utterly unjustifiable in a private person, may be highly proper and absolutely necessary in one of a public character.

It was revealed to the Prophet that the time of his departure was at hand, and that he also must die, even as Aaron had done, for their offence at the waters of Meribah*. It appears that this was extremely distressing to him, and that he earnestly desired permission to go into Canaan†. But when that was denied him, he acquiesced; and, as he was concerned chiefly that the cause of God might not suffer by his removal, he prayed only that a successor might be appointed, qualified for the office, who should conduct the people to their promised habitation.—And is it not most becoming a dying saint, to be solicitous for the welfare and prosperity of the Church, when his labours in it are drawing near to a conclusion? Let us intreat God to protect his own Israel, and, whatever faithful ministers he may take to himself, to raise up others in their stead; that His work may be carried on from age to age, till all his redeemed are brought home to the heavenly Canaan. We do not hear Moses petitioning for the advancement of his own family, but for the congregation of the Lord; nor should any private con-

* Num. xxvii. 12, &c.

† Deut. iii. 23.

nections be so dear to us as the interests of Zion.
 "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper
 that love thee*."

The successor, whom Moses himself before his death initiated into the office, was not one of his own kindred, but of another house and of another tribe. The sons of Moses were overlooked, and Joshua was invested with the high dignity. A very strong proof, that the Jewish Lawgiver was not actuated by selfishness, or ambition, or any of the contracted views of human politicians. It appears throughout, from the manner in which he both received and resigned his commission, that the establishment of the government was entirely of God.

We cannot contemplate the close of this good man's life without admiring his extraordinary zeal and diligence even at that solemn season. Though he knew that his dissolution was nigh, he remitted not his usual exertions, but rather with increasing vigour laboured in the work of the Lord, that he might "finish his course with joy." It is remarkable, that all those lively, pious, and importunate exhortations, which are contained in the book of Deuteronomy, were probably delivered to the people during the last month of his continuance upon earth. We learn, then, from this bright pattern, to fill up every portion of time with some useful employment: and though we should have certain intimations, that we shall soon be dismissed from our present post, it will become us with unwearied perseverance to attend to our respective duties, even till our strength utterly fail us.

* Psal. cxxii. 6.

Much did he speak and write concerning the Saviour of the world: but these declarations were chiefly wrapt up in the darkness of types and shadows. They were designed, however, to lead the Church to the knowledge of the great Redeemer; and therefore Jesus said, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me*."—One very striking and express prediction of the promised Messiah, which was uttered a little before his death, we must not omit. "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken †." This has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth ‡, to whom, therefore, our attention is directed. Let all men "know assuredly, that he is both Lord and Christ §:" and if "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy,—of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ¶?"

Years before
Christ, 1451.

At the very advanced age of one hundred and twenty years, the work of Moses was concluded, in an honourable manner, yet not without some circumstances of humiliation. When he had finished his testimony, on the very day he had been instructing, exhorting, warning, and encouraging the people, he was commanded to take his last leave of them, and ascend up to one of the highest mountains in the plains of Moab ¶. There he was told, that he must lay down his earthly tabernacle, though in his

* John v. 46.

§ ii. 36.

† Deut. xviii. 15.

¶ Heb. x. 28, 29.

‡ Acts iii. 22.—vii. 37.

§ Deut. xxxii. 48, &c.

full strength: "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated*." This was an awful summons, especially as it was accompanied with a reproof for his transgression at Meribah; and his death was expressly declared to be inflicted as a punishment. But, tremendous as the sentence was, the judgment was mixed with mercy; and though God, for righteous purposes, manifested his displeasure, He withheld not from his servant the tokens of his favour, but honoured and comforted him in his dying moments. The Lord promised to shew him the good land, and gave him by faith to see the future glory and prosperity of Israel. Moses, therefore, in firm dependence on the Covenant of his God, and in lively hope of a better kingdom than Canaan, went up with cheerful steps to the top of Pisgah. Probably, just before his ascent, he took an affecting leave of the people, and, in the spirit of prophecy, pronounced a solemn benediction upon them†. His last words, which are recorded, were spoken in admiration of the God of Israel, and of the blessedness of the nation he had chosen and redeemed to himself: "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun.—Happy art thou, O Israel! Who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord?" In this joyful, triumphant frame of mind he mounted up the hill, to meet his dissolution, and having viewed the promised inheritance of Israel, he closed his eyes upon every thing below; and, from the sight of an earthly Canaan, immediately entered upon the possession of heaven.

* Deut. xxxiv. 7.

† xxxiii. 1, &c.

Yet we perceive something extremely afflictive in the circumstances of his death; and it should serve as a signal warning to Believers, to “abhor that which is evil,” and to walk with a holy watchfulness and caution, if indeed they desire to be dismissed from life with honour and with comfort. The offence of Moses, we have seen, was such as we might have thought trivial; and we have no doubt that it was forgiven; yet, as it was of a public nature, God determined that there should be a public declaration of his displeasure against it; in order that sin might appear, in the view of all the people, “exceeding sinful.” “He punished Moses FOR THEIR SAKES.”—It is possible, then, that some, who are dear to God, may be perplexed with much spiritual darkness at the last, on account of past negligence, and perhaps go out of the world through some awful visitation, by an immediate judgment from heaven, though they be in a state of acceptance, and their souls be saved for ever.

The burial of Moses might seem too trifling to be mentioned, had not the sacred history recorded it as most remarkable*. The Lord himself took care of the body, and without any human aid committed it to the ground. The place of his interment was purposely concealed, that the Israelites, who were continually prone to idolatry, might not be tempted to worship at his sepulchre. We know and rejoice in it, that his better part, which could not be confined in the grave, ascended up on high, to a distinguished rank among the ransomed of the Lord. Moses, therefore, still

* Deut. xxxiv. 6.

liveth; and accordingly, he was one, who graced the triumph of our Saviour in the transfiguration on the mount; and he will shortly come in His glorious retinue at the last day. Then may we join with all that favoured company, who shall “sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb*!”

Upon a review of this history, we shall not wonder, that a character so eminent has been celebrated in every age; that he was held in respect by the most learned of the Gentile world; and that the Jews always boasted of him, as the great Founder of their church and nation. Most justly may he be proposed to all, as a bright example of righteousness, and more particularly of that disposition so pleasing to God, a meekness of temper. Let us enquire, then, How far do we resemble Moses? Do we not betray sad marks of impatience, anger, and resentment? Let us not allege, that our provocations are many: they are not worthy to be mentioned, in comparison of those which Moses had to struggle with for forty years together. If there be no opposition, there cannot be much proof of a gentle spirit; but if we possess the grace of God in truth, we shall be thereby taught to preserve a composure of mind, and to exercise forgiveness and love, even in return for many and great injuries. Thus did Moses. Oh! how unlike to him are we? “Whereas there is among us envying, and strife, and divisions, are we not carnal, and walk as men?”

But this illustrious pattern, in an especial manner, claims the attention of the Ministers of religion. For

* Rev. xv. 3.

they are called to execute an office, in many respects like that of Moses, which will subject them to some such painful trials, as he met with. They should be prepared to expect the most groundless and malicious censures from those, whose best interests they are uniformly and zealously pursuing. It will, therefore, instruct and comfort them, to place before their eyes the conduct of this man of God; and while they see him steadily persevering in his work, they will take fresh courage to hold on their way. But let them copy after his example. They require the same firmness, zeal, and fortitude, which he possessed; nor have they reason to doubt, that He who has appointed them to their most arduous employment, will endue them with all that strength, which is necessary for the due discharge of it. Have they many fears and misgivings? So had the great leader of the Hebrews: but in Him also we behold, what God can enable his servants to do. When he was first called out of Midian, he was backward, timid, and unbelieving; and therein he discovered the weakness of a fallen nature. But afterwards, with unwearied exertions and undaunted courage, he maintained his post against all opposition; for he “ staggered not at the promise,” in the midst of the most formidable dangers: and in these respects he fully proved the efficacious influence of divine grace. Let us seek for, and rely upon, the same mighty power; for, in every case, “ the help that is done upon earth the Lord doeth it himself.”

But the Ministers of Christ, together with the firmness of Moses, should possess his meekness of spirit.

This

This will be their brightest ornament, their strongest recommendation, and their surest defence. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*."—Thus, by their humble and inoffensive behaviour, they should be an example to Believers, and exhibit in themselves the happy effects of the Gospel which they preach: and by such means they will be most likely to disarm their fiercest opponents of their rage.—Yet in order to ensure success to their ministry, they must imitate the Jewish prophet in another respect, and, like him, "continue instant in prayer." We have seen him, in every difficulty, flying for direction, support, and deliverance, to the God of all grace; nor was he once deserted. In the same way should they, who are the spiritual guides of the people, expect all their help from God, and keep up a continual intercourse with Him, that they may obtain his presence and blessing in all their ministrations. Whatever splendid talents they possess, notwithstanding their wisdom, eloquence, zeal, and diligence, it is not probable that they will be of any real use to others, unless they are themselves men of devotion, frequent and fervent in their supplications to Heaven.

Much has been said of the excellency of Moses. But we are acquainted with a character abundantly superior in every view, and "worthy of more glory, inasmuch as He, who hath builded the house, hath

* 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25.

more honour than the house *.” “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ †.” It is not our design to enter fully into a comparison between them: but it ought not to pass unobserved, that in the high offices, which the Jewish leader sustained, he was a most eminent type of the great Captain of our salvation. Moses was to the Israelites, what Jesus is to his Church in every age, a PROPHET, PRIEST, and KING;—the MEDIATOR of the Covenant. Jesus is commissioned to rescue his people from a bondage, inconceivably worse than that of Egypt, and to conduct them through many dangers to the possession of a kingdom, but faintly shadowed forth by “the land that flowed with milk and honey.” He is their instructor, declaring to them the divine will, and teaching them “how they ought to walk and to please God.” He ministers for them in holy things, stands before God continually “to make reconciliation for their sins,” and offers up incessant petitions for them. They are most perverse, indeed, and rebellious, as the Israelites; but they are spared through the prevalency of his intercession. He is their Law-giver, and has delivered them statutes and ordinances the most wise and excellent, to which he requires their unfeigned submission. Let all honour, then, admiration, love, and obedience be given to our Jesus! But is he not “despised and rejected of men?” How few do truly acknowledge him in his various offices? And what may we expect the conse-

* Heb. iii. 3.

† John i. 17.

quence to be? Is it forgotten, what the sentence was against the disobedient Israelites, "whose carcases fell in the wilderness?" For; "if they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven *."

* Heb. xii. 25.

P H A R A O H.

C H A P. XIV.

Pharaoh rejected the petition of Moses, and defied Jehovah—persecuted the Hebrews—unhumbled under all the divine judgments—terrified, but unwilling to submit to God's terms—confessed his guilt, yet impenitent—pursued the Hebrews—drowned in the Red sea—his obduracy and destruction, how ascribed to God—an awful instance of human depravity—a warning to sinners.

As we were considering the life of Moses, we had occasion to advert to the character of that impious king of Egypt, with whom the Jewish prophet maintained so singular a contest. It may answer an useful purpose to recall some of those circumstances in the sacred history, which we have already touched upon, in order that we may take a fuller view of that proud persecutor. This will furnish us with the most solemn and interesting reflections: for in the case of Pharaoh we shall perceive a very striking proof of the extreme corruption and desperate wickedness of the human heart, as also of the sovereignty, justice, and invincible power of God. The example in an especial manner demands the attention of every presumptuous sinner; for to such an one the application is obvious: "God is greater than man: Why dost thou strive against Him?"

Him? Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like Him*?"

The instance before us exhibits a picture of one of the most insolent offenders, that the world ever beheld, —a most daring opposer of the King of heaven,—declaring himself a decided enemy, and carrying on the contest against Him, with inflexible obstinacy,—resisting all admonitions, despising the mercy, and defying the wrath of God, till he was made a monument of his vengeance. How much important instruction does this convey to us! Shall we not confess the folly and madness of those who “walk contrary to God?” For, “He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: Who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered†?” Shall we not be led to examine, what is our own character; and to pray with greater fervour than we have yet done, “From all hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word and commandment, Good Lord deliver us‡?” The example of Pharaoh is proposed to us, not for our imitation, but with a view to excite our abhorrence of his conduct. May we see the odiousness of his temper, and ourselves possess a different spirit! But, as we all partake of the same depraved nature, perhaps it will be found upon enquiry, that, in some respects, and to a certain degree, we still resemble him.

The king, of whom we are now speaking, was not the person from whom Moses had fled to Midian. The name of Pharaoh seems to have been common to all the princes of Egypt in succession for many ages.

* Job xxxii. 12, 13. xl. 9. † Job ix. 4. ‡ Litany.

This man, however, as he inherited the title, was also governed by the maxims, of his predecessor. It will be sufficient for us to point out the principal circumstances, which the scriptures have recorded concerning him.

Years before
Christ, 1491. He is first introduced to our notice in the sacred history, when Moses and Aaron were sent to him with a message from the God of heaven, and demanded for the Israelites the liberty of exercising their religion*. The requisition was reasonable: but, as it had been for some time one grand object of the government to crush the Hebrews, no favours could be granted them. Nor would the proud tyrant bear to be dictated to, even by Jehovah himself. He did not call in question their commission, nor ask what evidence they could produce for it; but he repulsed them with the most daring contempt both of them, and of the divine authority by which they spake; determined, whatever should be the consequence, that he would not stand in awe of their God, nor acknowledge subjection to Him. Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?" He probably conceived meanly of the God of the Hebrews, having long held that people in the lowest state of oppression, and therefore he most insolently set Him at defiance, as if there were nothing to be dreaded from such a God as this. Thus the contest took its rise from the arrogance of Pharaoh, who presumed to exalt himself against Jehovah, and refused to listen to his word. How wonderful, that vengeance was not immediately

* Exod. v. 1, &c.

executed!

executed! Did the haughty tyrant ask, in supercilious contempt, "Who is the Lord?" Rather might we say, in admiration of the divine forbearance, "Who is Pharaoh, that the Lord should send any further message to him, or withhold the punishment due to his iniquity?"

But is this a singular case? We fear there are multitudes of like character. The king of Egypt spake only what is the real sentiment of many hearts; for all unrenewed persons possess something of the same disposition. Man, in his fallen state, affects independency, and disdains to yield submission to the will of God himself. He will not be controlled; but, impatient of all restraint even from the highest authority, he says, "Why may I not live as I please? Who is Lord over me? Or what is the Almighty, that I should serve Him?" The ministers of Christ are often rejected with the same insolent contempt, as Moses and Aaron were by Pharaoh. Not a few cast the word of God behind them, with an air of utter indifference, examine not its evidence, and determine not to be awed by it. But may we not admonish sinners to beware, how they undertake to contend with God? Do you ask, "Who is the Lord?" It is He, who hath made you, and gave you to be what you are: It is He, who has upheld you to this moment, and "in whose hand your breath is:" It is He, who will shortly vindicate his right over you, will summon you to his bar, and judge you according to your works. And is He the object of your scorn? What must be the issue, if you presume to strive with Him?

The

The enmity and the rage of Pharaoh, which had been excited by the declaration of the Lord's message to him, appeared also in his persecuting spirit. And when the Lord himself is set at nought, it is no wonder that his servants are despised. Long time had the Israelites groaned under the Egyptian bondage, and all the power of the kingdom had been exerted to crush them. The exercise of their religion was denied them; and now, when some privilege of this nature was demanded for them, they were oppressed the more. The king was "implacable, unmerciful." We say not, that he might not justify his conduct by political motives; but it is obvious that the ground of his opposition was pride and a profane contempt of God. 'Like other politicians, he pretended a regard to the public welfare, and treated the religion of the Hebrews as a vain and dangerous superstition, and the commission of Moses and Aaron as a mere pretence for their ambition or their sloth. They were considered, therefore, as enemies to the state; and this poor enslaved people were subjected to a more rigorous servitude. For he said, "Ye are idle, ye are idle;—Let there more work be laid upon the men."

O let us beware, lest We betray the same scornful and oppressive spirit, especially towards persons "professing godliness." We possess not the power of Pharaoh; but are we not exerting all the influence we have, to prevent the true Israel of God from sacrificing unto Him? Perhaps their sentiments and practice may oppose our covetous or aspiring views: and is it not for this cause that we reproach them as neglecting

their appointed work, and lay heavy burdens upon them? Such was the very disposition of the tyrant of Egypt; and it was one principal reason, which provoked the Lord to bring down the severest calamities upon that whole country. Let us fear for ourselves; for God will surely avenge the wrongs of his insulted people, to the utter confusion of their enemies.

The two prophets of Israel had a second and third audience of the king, but with no better success. They performed certain miracles in his presence, in order to prove their commission*; but he wished, or rather determined, not to be convinced, and therefore it pleased God, in righteous judgment on his obstinacy, to furnish him with a pretext for his incredulity. The Magicians were permitted to imitate some of the wonders which had been wrought; whence, probably, Pharaoh concluded, that the two messengers of Heaven were no other than skilful forcerers, who might indeed have the advantage of his Magi, but had no more right to dictate unto Him. On this account "his heart was hardened," neither did he hearken unto them, but despised and insulted them as mere pretenders to revelation.—Perhaps some modern Infidels may be under a similar delusion, and be given up, like Pharaoh, "to believe a lie." They are unwilling to receive the word of God, and strive, with the utmost stretch of their ingenuity, to invent arguments to disprove the divine authority of the scriptures. It is nothing strange then, that to persons so disposed many objections arise, which seem to themselves to justify their unbelief.

* Exod. vii. 10, &c.

The Lord suffers our integrity to be put to the test in this very way. The evidence for Christianity is abundantly sufficient to convince men of meek and upright minds: but we allow, that it is not of such a nature as to force conviction upon those, who secretly dislike it, and are resolved to reject it. "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil*."

Various miracles were wrought, or rather, one plague after another was inflicted, in order to humble this proud sinner. Every succeeding judgment gave fresh and stronger proof, that he was contending with a great God and terrible, whose arm none can resist. By the most tremendous visitations, the Lord made known his own sovereign majesty and invincible power, and demanded submission* from the king. The calamities, brought upon him, were beyond measure afflictive; enough, we might have supposed, to terrify and to soften the most obdurate offender. The Magicians, after some ineffectual trials by their enchantments, being baffled and confounded, acknowledged the presence of God. But Pharaoh continued to harden his heart against all conviction, despised the most solemn warnings, with a mixture of arrogance and rage maintained the daring contest, and resolved to hazard every consequence, rather than yield the victory even to God himself. Nay, each judgment found him more unfeeling than the preceding; at least he was as far removed from real humiliation and repentance, in the end as at the beginning.

* John iii. 19.

It is a most unfavourable sign indeed, when the severest punishments produce no proper sense of sin, when they do not give an alarm to the conscience, or force the sinner to his knees, to cry with the most earnest supplication for mercy. And how many, like Pharaoh, have been deaf to all the admonitions of God, both by the mouth of his ministers and the sore visitations of his providence! O consider, You children of affliction, what effect your sufferings have had upon you! You have been tried, perhaps, by various calamities, in your persons, your families, your substance; but have you enquired, "Where is God my maker? Wherefore doth he contend with me? Or, what would He have me to do?" For "surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend any more. That which I see not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more*." And are you sincere in your acknowledgments of guilt, your professions of sorrow, and your resolutions of amendment? It was Pharaoh's condemnation, that he hardened his heart against all the divine corrections, and, whatever he might pretend, never truly humbled himself under the rod. Beware, then, of sinning in the same way, and listen to the gracious voice of God in his severest dispensation, which calls you to prayer, and contrition, and repentance. Otherwise, you will have reason to dread some heavier calamity, or, what is inexpressibly more terrible, you may be given up to utter impenitence and final obduracy. For

* Job xxxiv. 31, 32.

may it not be said, "Why should ye be stricken any more*?"

It may be urged perhaps, that Pharaoh felt much compunction, and discovered hopeful appearances of conversion. But the plea will not bear examination, or prove any thing in his favour. For it points him out as a hypocrite and a dissembler with God: and this, it should be remembered, is one distinguishing part of his character. Though he was a bold and presumptuous offender, he was not, from the first, "past feeling;" but, on some occasions at least, he was brought under an apprehension of his danger, and, through great terror of mind, forced to confess his guilt. In such circumstances he might have the semblance of a penitent, but he possessed not, in the smallest degree, any hatred of his sin, or any real desire to be reconciled to God. His humiliation, then, under the smart of his affliction, was all a mere pretence, the basest dissimulation. What will avail such repentance as this? Let us beware, lest we mistake a fear of punishment, or a transient alarm of conscience, for a truly humble and contrite spirit. Distress and anguish may constrain the most obdurate to cry out, as Pharaoh, "I have sinned;" or the dread of extreme suffering may fill them with horror, and produce a partial and temporary reformation, even while the heart continues totally unchanged and destitute of every holy principle.

The insincerity of Pharaoh was manifest in two instances,

• Isa. i. 5.

1. He was unwilling, throughout, to submit to the terms which God required. The divine injunction was, that he should let Israel go three days journey into the wilderness, for the purpose of a religious festival; to which he gave the most peremptory refusal, "I will not let Israel go." But when the waters, through all his kingdom, were turned into blood, and the very river, which was idolized, was become offensive; when all habitations, not excepting his own palace, were infested with frogs; under the pressure of these calamities he consented for a moment to the conditions proposed. He called for Moses and Aaron, and said, "Intreat the Lord that he may take away the frogs from me, and from my people; and I will let the people go, that they may do sacrifice unto the Lord*." But, when a respite came, his fears were dispersed, his former principles resumed their power over him, he revoked his permission, and appeared more callous than before. He relented, indeed, when the whole country was overspread and desolated by flies; and he granted leave that the Israelites should exercise their religion. But this was not an unfeigned submission to God. He would have his own terms, and stood like one making a bargain and requiring some abatement. He insisted that they should not depart out of his dominion: "Go ye, sacrifice to your God IN THE LAND." When this would not suffice, he allowed that they might go into the wilderness, but limited the distance; "Only ye shall not go very far away." Yet, partial as the concession was, it was re-

* Exod. viii. 8.

called upon the removal of the plague. This base hypocrisy provoked the Lord to send a heavier judgment; for multitudes of cattle, of every kind, were destroyed by a very grievous murrain; but it had no influence upon the obdurate heart of the tyrant*. Most loathsome and painful boils were then inflicted both on man and beast; but the haughty monarch still refused to submit. Again he was threatened, and chastised yet more severely. A most tremendous storm of hail, attended with uncommon thunder and lightning, laid waste his whole country, and filled him with such horror, as constrained him to acknowledge his guilt, and to promise obedience to the divine command. But all this was merely the effect of terror; for, when the tempest abated, he recanted his late declarations, and became more obstinate than before.—Another message from God required his subjection†; and, upon the expostulation of his servants, he seemed disposed to make some concessions; but they were no sooner made than retracted, and at length he drove away the prophets of the Lord with indignation. To punish his impenitence, the plague of the locusts was sent, whereby his kingdom was reduced to extreme distress; and then again, under the dread of utter destruction, he professed to give up the contest, and sued for mercy. He called for Moses and Aaron in haste: and he said, “I have sinned against the Lord your God, and against you. Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and intreat the Lord your God, that he may take away from me this death only.” The affliction

* Exod. ix. 1, &c. † x. 1, &c.

was removed; and immediately the tyrant resumed his opposition, and shewed the insincerity of his professions. —Again he was constrained to feel the mighty power of God over him, and to tremble under His judgments. A terrible darkness throughout the land, for three days together, perplexed and affrighted him; and under this impression he consented, that the Israelites might depart, and take with them their families, but still insisted that their flocks and their herds should be left behind. Here the unsoundness of his heart appeared, because he would not yield without reserve. When his partial concessions, therefore, were rejected, he would hear no more, but closed the debate by threatening the prophet of the Lord with instant death, if, from that time, he should ever venture into his presence.

This exhibits a very striking representation of the character of an unhumbléd sinner, who may be brought under temporary convictions, and, in a sudden alarm of conscience, may put on the semblance of a penitent. Alas, how common is the case! The Lord calls to an unconditional submission. We spurn at the demand; and, though again and again required to bow before Him with unfeigned subjection, we maintain a presumptuous contest with Him. He lays his hand upon us, and, by one severe visitation after another, he summons us to surrender. Perhaps some sore affliction may extort a confession and a kind of prayer for mercy. But have we not dealt deceitfully, and been guilty of base prevarications? Have we not made the most solemn vows and promises, rashly and insincerely? Have we

we not refused our consent to the terms proposed, vainly expecting that God would grant us some relaxation, and come down to our conditions? This is a sure mark of hypocrisy. If every thing be not given up to God, and his will complied with, in one instance as well as another, there is no true resignation of the soul to him; and, in such a state, professions of regard will avail nothing, neither will they be lasting. Do you imagine, that He will accept of less than your whole hearts? No: "He is in one mind, and who can turn him?" Do you plead for any prohibited indulgence; for this sin to be retained, for that passion to be gratified? It cannot be allowed. Do you object to one duty, because it is inconvenient; to another, as being too strict, and exposing you to many difficulties? What do you, but tread in the steps of Pharaoh, and discover the same dissimulating temper? Or what can you look for, but some heavier judgment, to punish you for your "pride and stoutness of heart?"

The king of Egypt, we have seen, at times acknowledged his guilt; but here also his want of integrity appeared: for

2. His very confessions were constrained, and of such a sort as to prove, that he was a stranger to real humiliation, throughout the controversy. He cried out in anguish, "I have sinned;" but this he did, only under the pressure of affliction, or the dread of an impending calamity. The removal of the danger soon put an end to his pretended penitence. When restored to ease, he forgot his resolutions and engagements, and returned to his former sentiments. We were pleased to hear him say,

say, "I have sinned this time; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked: intreat the Lord; for it is enough*;"—and we were led to expect a favourable conclusion of the contest, in the conversion of Pharaoh. But alas! how often have appearances deceived us! We have seen persons under heavy losses, in extreme pain, or a dangerous disease, lamenting their folly, making strong protestations of amendment, sending for pious friends and ministers, and calling upon them all to pray for them. But we have been distressed to find, that these impressions were superficial and transient, and therefore not the effect of any good principle. They have been "as a morning cloud, and as the early dew that goeth away†." We apprehend, that the approach of death, the dread of meeting an incensed God, and of being doomed to everlasting misery, may force many to speak the language of penitents, which, nevertheless, they understand not. They retain the love of sin, and have no true knowledge of the evil of it; but they fear punishment, and therefore most eagerly implore deliverance. "Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them‡." But all this passes for nothing in the court of heaven. For the Lord saith, "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds§."

One circumstance deserves our serious notice. Pharaoh frequently besought Moses to intercede for him, and to intreat the Lord on his behalf. But we do not per-

* Exod. ix. 27, 28.

† Hof. vi. 4.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 16.

§ Hof. vii. 14.

ceive, that he ever bowed his knees before God, or put up one petition for himself. And alas! what avail all our confessions to men, or solicitations for their help? We must "make supplication to our judge;" or else we have no proper sense of our ill desert.—But let not the instance before us discourage those, who are importunately calling upon God, under a conviction of their exceeding guiltiness, and who desire peace with Him above all other blessings. These persons submit to their severest trials without murmuring, and feel the burthen of sin heavier than all other afflictions. But it is evident, that Pharaoh sought deliverance from trouble, more than reconciliation with God, and retained, to the last, the same proud, oppressive disposition. No wonder, then, that the conflict issued in his final perdition.

When the admonitions of conscience are invariably resisted, and the judgments of God despised, there is little hope. The heart becomes more and more insensible to good, and is more readily carried away by every vile affection: and hence those, who have been once awakened, and return to folly, are generally the most desperate offenders.—Very awful calamities had been inflicted upon Pharaoh, and others were denounced; but still he maintained his opposition, in defiance of all that God could do against him. According to the intimation, then, which had been given, after three preceding days of total darkness, the Angel of the Lord went forth at midnight, and destroyed the first born of every Egyptian family*. The

* Exod. xi. 4, &c. xii. 29, &c.

consternation,

consternation, produced by this tremendous visitation throughout the land, was beyond all description. Cries of distress were heard in every house; and the king himself was filled with horror and amazement. Then he appeared indeed to yield the conquest, and to comply with the terms proposed. He called for Moses and Aaron, whom he had a little before threatened with death, and even requested them, with all the congregation of Israel, immediately to quit the country (without imposing upon them one limitation or restraint), and, through an impression of terror, intreated them to bless Him before their departure. Nay, to hasten their flight, both he and his subjects were urgent upon the people, and loaded them with the riches of the kingdom. Thus the tyrant was baffled, and obliged to give up his point; and the God of Israel prevailed.

But, though Pharaoh was defeated, his pride of heart was not subdued. As soon therefore as he recovered from his fright, being extremely mortified for the disgrace he had suffered, and fired with indignation against those who had triumphed over him, he formed the scheme of pursuing them, that he might either bring them back to his dominion, or else wreak all his vengeance upon them. The situation of the Israelites also was so ordered, as to afford him hopes of success: and it is a righteous thing with God, to furnish men with opportunities of discovering their most corrupt dispositions. As if every former conviction had been utterly effaced, he was led away by his impetuous

petuous passions, ambition, covetousness, anger, and revenge. With his best chosen troops he followed the Hebrews, and pressed upon them so closely, that they were cut off from all visible means of deliverance, and, probably, the infatuated King was confident of obtaining an easy and complete victory. But did he not recede, when the Lord, "with his glorious arm divided the water," and conducted his redeemed nation through the deep? Did not this stupendous miracle at last prove to him, that they were the immediate care of an Almighty God, and that it were madness to carry on so unequal a contest? Alas! no evidence is sufficient to convince a determined infidel. He is blinded by his vile affections; "a deceived heart hath turned him aside." Thus it was with Pharaoh, who rushed into the sea, "as the horse into the battle," filled with rage against God and his people, and vainly attempted to recover them out of His hand. But the Lord fought for Israel; and "by strength shall no man prevail" against Him. The pillar and the cloud were a light and protection to the Israelites; but the Egyptians were thereby troubled and dismayed. They were also stopped in their progress, while they were in the middle of the channel, and confounded by what they saw or heard. At length they confessed their folly, and consulted about retreating: but it was too late. The command was given for the waters to return to their place; the proud rebel was vanquished, and, with all the flower of Egypt, buried in the deep.

"So shall the wicked perish in the presence of God." In the example of Pharaoh, we have an awful representation

sentation of their case. When loud calls to repentance have been disobeyed, and both the judgments and the mercies of God have been ineffectual to bend the stubborn heart, what is to be expected, but the most presumptuous continuance and rapid advancement in sin, and, of consequence, aggravated ruin? They will not turn nor fear God, though, in the way of their opposition, nothing but final and everlasting destruction awaits them. "They stretch out their hand against God, and strengthen themselves against the Almighty*." But "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces†." We would affectionately warn them of those floods of wrath, which will overwhelm the ungodly in "the bottomless pit." We would address them with a compassionate importunity, "Have pity on your own souls: destroy not yourselves: for why will ye die? Behold, the God, who is jealous of his honour, and is determined to take vengeance on his enemies, hath prepared for you the instruments of death; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready‡. O drop the vain contest; throw down your arms, and surrender at discretion. We pray you, in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God§!"

To the whole of this history one very strong objection has been urged. We are required to justify the proceedings of God towards the rebellious king of Egypt, who, we are assured, was appointed to this very state. "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that

* Job xv. 25. † 1 Sam. ii. 10. ‡ Psal. vii. 12, 13.

§ 2 Cor. v. 20.

I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth*.”—We do not say there is no difficulty in the subject; but, perhaps, it has often been misrepresented and abused. We acknowledge that the judgments of God are a great deep, and we pretend not to fathom them: but it will become us, with serious reverence, to enquire into the plain assertions of the inspired writers, not indulging a cavilling temper, on the one hand, nor on the other presuming to decide magisterially, on matters confessedly mysterious.

It is repeatedly remarked by the sacred historian, that “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart;” and such a conduct is objected to, as inconsistent with the perfections of God. For it is asked, How can it be reconciled with his holiness, to represent Him as the author of sin, producing in Pharaoh that obduracy, which is the last stage of human depravity? Or how can it accord with his goodness and justice, to excite any wrong disposition in the minds of sinners, and then blame and punish them for it?

To this we may reply; God certainly foresaw that those very circumstances, which He had resolved to bring about, would occasion in Pharaoh an obstinacy of spirit; and therefore He predicted, and, in a sense, might be said to appoint that, which was the consequence of his dispensation. Whether we can understand it or not, God is declared to have foreknown and determined events and transactions, in which much wickedness was committed (such were the treachery

* Rom. ix. 17,

of Judas, and the crucifixion of the Saviour); and yet as the free agency of the offenders was not, in any measure, affected, so neither was their guilt at all lessened, by his prescience or decree concerning them: "Truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined: but wo unto that man, by whom he is betrayed*."—"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain†."

But we may ask, What is meant by the objection, that God is hereby represented as "the author of sin‡?" If it be so explained, as if He were the agent or doer of any wicked thing, we reject the supposition with abhorrence, since it would be a blasphemous reproach to his character. But if it implies only, that He permits, or does not prevent, the transgression of his own law, and at the same time, for wise and holy purposes, so disposes of events, that sin will certainly follow, if men are not forcibly restrained; this, we apprehend, will not, cannot be denied, for it is manifestly a part of his administration, as appears from the whole course of his providence. Nor can the conduct of the moral governor of the world be justly censured on this account, since we maintain that he never infused a bad thought or principle into the mind of any one. In such a sense, he could not harden Pharaoh's heart, for he tempteth no man to sin§. But in the language of scripture, He is said to do, what he suffers to be done: and accordingly it is declared, that

* Luke xxii. 22.

† Acts ii. 23.

‡ Edwards on the freedom of the will. § James i. 13:

God moved David to number Israel, though, in another place, this is ascribed to Satan, as the immediate agent*.

We have already intimated, that He appointed such dispensations, as He knew beforehand would encourage Pharaoh to persist in his daring opposition; and it should be remembered, that, in order to make men most obdurate in wickedness, nothing more is necessary, than that God should leave them to the unrestrained influence of their own turbulent passions. And Who shall object to this? Is not His grace his own? Or shall we prescribe unto Him, when and how He must communicate this grace unto us? Is there unrighteousness with Him, if He withdraw that assistance, to which we have no claim, and which alone will prevent us from running into all iniquity with greediness? Or is He to be charged with all our depravity, because he is pleased to afford us opportunities of shewing what is in our nature?

The obduracy of sinners is often spoken of as judicial; but that is only, where mercies have been long abused, and admonitions have proved ineffectual. The Lord hath said, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man†:" and when He departs they become inflexibly obstinate in all evil‡. Yet even this state of mind, though appointed as a judgment for former impenitence, is highly sinful in itself, and justly deserves the severest punishment. Such appears to have been Pharaoh's case; for, according to the history, he had openly

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. 1 Chron. xxi. 1. † Gen. vi. 3.

‡ See Psal. lxxxi. 12. Acts vii. 42. Rom. i. 24—28.

defied the Lord God of Hosts, before his heart was hardened by Him.

Upon the whole, the example was designed to furnish us with most important instructions. Pharaoh was raised to such an eminence of rank, and suffered to carry on the contest to such a length, that it might be more clearly manifest, that "the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart*." We behold in the wicked tyrant of Egypt, what baseness we are all capable of committing. Shall we not, then, dread that sentence, "Let them alone," more than any other; and pray that God would never leave us nor forsake us, lest we also, as Pharaoh, give a like awful proof of the extreme depravity of our nature?—Have we been preserved from this state? And are we now possessed of a tenderness of conscience, and drawn to God by the gracious influences of his Spirit? O what do we owe to our heavenly Benefactor? Or how shall we express our gratitude? Let all glory be ascribed to Him, who hath taken us out of the world, to be a people for his name!

Nothing, that has been here advanced, should discourage the awakened and humbled penitent. Many sincere persons are distressed by the fear of resembling Pharaoh, at the very time they exhibit the strongest evidence, that their character is most opposite. We ask, then, Do you mourn before God, for your past rebellion against Him? Do you hate every false way? Do you unfeignedly desire to be reconciled to God? And are you willing to submit

* Eccles. ix. 3.

to His terms? Then be not terrified: Pharaoh's case is not your's. You are not given up to final impenitence; for the impressions you now have upon your minds are a favourable sign of a good influence. Only be afraid of resisting your present convictions: "quench not the Spirit;" but yield yourselves obedient to his guidance.

The instance before us seems more especially addressed to presumptuous offenders. And are there not those amongst us, who, with as much rage as Pharaoh, continue to fight against God, and bid defiance to the Omnipotent himself? We intreat them to pause, and to consider what the issue of such a contest must be. What was the consequence, when "there was war in heaven?" The Angels, who were great in might, were vanquished, and "cast into a lake of fire." What advantage did Pharaoh gain, by his daring obstinacy in opposing the purposes of God? Alas! by every effort, which he made, he did but wound himself, and hasten his own destruction. Shall we, then, "provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?"

Sinners presume upon the mercy of God, as if he would never punish. But has he not already, by various examples, displayed the terrors of his justice? The universal deluge,—the conflagration of Sodom and Gomorrah,—and the entire overthrow of Pharaoh and his numerous host,—are all so many proofs that the Lord is a righteous God, who cannot bear iniquity. "Sentence against an evil work is not executed

cuted speedily* :” but, in order that it may be known, “there is a God that judgeth in the earth †,” He has, at different times, arrested, some bold offenders, and exhibited them as public monuments of his vengeance. To this end, he is pleased, in general, to select those only, who are of most abandoned characters; though every transgressor is liable to his wrath. “For this cause he raised up Pharaoh,” and glorified himself in the destruction of that arrogant sinner. By and by he will give to ALL “according to their works,” and will be honoured in the final perdition of those, who refuse to submit to his grace. Nor will any of them, who perish, be able to cast upon Him the blame of their sin and ruin; but all must confess at the last solemn day, “Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy judgments!”—For the present, He is patient towards the most rebellious, and “endures them with much long-suffering;” and when he shall arise to condemn the impenitent and unbelieving, every mouth shall be stopped. Long has he borne with our perverseness: let us no more despise the riches of his mercy; but may his goodness effectually lead us to repentance!

Ecclef. viii. 11.

† Psal. lviii. 11.

B A L . A A M.

C H A P. XIV.

Balaam exhibits the bad effects of covetousness—eminent for wisdom—invited by Balak to curse Israel—refused at first, afterwards staggered—asked leave of God—went—stopped by an Angel, and rebuked—proceeded—constrained to bless Israel, and prophesy of the Saviour—laid snares for the Israelites, and died fighting against them.

THERE is not, perhaps, a more prevailing passion in the human mind, nor one, which is the occasion of more sin or misery, than an eager attachment to worldly gain. And yet few seem to apprehend the evil or the danger of it. For do not almost all look to their own advantage, and seek, by every possible method, to aggrandize themselves? And hence, what rapine, fraud, and oppression, what envy, strife, and resentment, obtain amongst men; and what dreadful confusion do these produce in society! As friends, therefore, to the temporal interest of our fellow creatures, we would earnestly intreat them to beware of covetousness; but we would enforce the caution, more especially, from a regard to their eternal happiness. For an ardent thirst after secular emoluments has ever been the most effectual hinderance to the progress of true religion. Alas! there are thousands around us, who willingly renounce the divine favour and the joys of heaven, for the uncertain prospect of securing to them-

felves a little “filthy lucre.” Various are the instances, recorded in scripture, of those, who, having once exhibited the most promising appearances of real piety, were betrayed into the basest conduct, and hurried on to final perdition, by this vile affection. Most strongly, then, are we warned against it from the awful cases of many hypocrites and apostates: and it becomes us, surely, to learn wisdom from the miscarriages of others. “They that will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows*.” Of the same sort is the description of St. Peter: “they have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass, speaking with man’s voice, forbade the madness of the prophet†.”

In the latter passage we have a comment, by an inspired writer in the new testament, on a character delineated in the old: an infamous character, all, who seriously examine, will allow it to be: and yet it may seem to include in it a strange medley of inconsistencies. The Apostle will guide us in our enquiries concerning this very singular example, and shew us from what principles a system of conduct the most detestable originated. In Balaam we perceive a man, possessed, in some measure at least, of right notions of religion,

* 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10. † 2 Pet. ii. 15, 16.

who, under an awful impression of the fear of God, discovered many strong convictions and desires of the best kind, and who was favoured not only with eminent abilities, but with "visions and revelations of the Lord;" who yet, through the influence of the accursed passion of covetousness, opposed the clearest dictates of his conscience, and the express commands of God, pursued the purposes of iniquity with cool deliberation, endeavoured by base artifices to obtain a licence to sin, and perished at last among the enemies of God. Remarkable as this character may appear, we shall find it, with some small difference of circumstances, to be a common one in the world. It will be incumbent upon all, while they are warned of that dangerous principle, by which Balaam was infatuated, to "beware lest they also be led away with the error of the wicked."

Years before
Christ, 1452. Balaam, it should seem, was eminent among the eastern nations, even to a considerable distance, for his skill and abilities in the art of divination. We enquire not of what nature that practice was, but it is clear, that, through the blindness of superstition, he gained an extensive reputation, and was much consulted and revered as a soothsayer, or magician. He is introduced to our notice in the history of the Israelites, upon the conclusion of their pilgrimage in the wilderness. When they were arrived at the plains of Moab, Balak, the king of that country, terrified at their approach, and, apprehending the worst consequences to himself and his people, began to consider what defence could be made*. But be-

* Num xxii. 1, &c.

fore the force of arms was tried, he was desirous to draw down a blessing on himself, and a curse upon his enemies, by the incantations of Balaam, whom he held in the highest estimation, and whose prayers and imprecations, he thought, would be effectual. This indeed was conformable to the ancient custom, which prevailed in many nations, of using certain religious rites, at the beginning of a war, in order to devote their adversaries to destruction.

Balaam, therefore, though far distant, was solicited by large offers of money to come and practise his art; and much was expected from his supposed knowledge, sanctity, and prevalency with Heaven. The rewards proposed for this service were a strong temptation, especially to one of his disposition; yet he presumed not to promise a compliance with the invitation, till he had consulted the will of God, by which alone he declared that he would be determined. By what particular method Balaam intended to ask, or hoped to receive, direction from above, we are not informed; but it pleased God to interpose, as in frequent instances He has done, to reveal his mind even to a wicked person. A clear and express answer was given to the magician; "Thou shalt not go with the men; thou shalt not curse the people; for they are blessed." Balaam, therefore, peremptorily refused to visit the king of Moab; and the messengers were dismissed. So far all appears fair; and, merely from this relation, we should suspect nothing wrong in the character before us.

But

But a second attempt was made, which proved more successful. Perhaps the weakness of the man was understood, for Balak, in his next application, had a particular view to Balaam's mercenary disposition, as he offered him larger presents. An embassy was dispatched, with a design to flatter his pride, as well as to work upon his avarice. A more numerous company, and those too of exalted rank, intreated his attendance, and urged their request by promises of great preferment, of riches and honour, to the utmost extent of his wishes. His first answer to this proposal might lead us to think him firm and disinterested; and we might be ready to admire his unshaken integrity, and contempt of filthy lucre, while we observe his reply, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." But being unwilling to forego all these advantages, he began to waver, because "his heart went after his covetousness." He, therefore, desired leave to deliberate, and he would consult the Lord again; or, in other words, he hoped that it might be made consistent with his duty, or that permission might be granted him, to go and pronounce an imprecation upon the Israelites.

Here, then, the mask drops off, and the unsoundness of his heart is discovered. His very hesitation on so plain a point implied a want of principle, a secret reserve, and duplicity of mind. He ought to have rejected the offer with disdain, and immediately to have dismissed the ambassadors, however respectable

able they might be. For why should he doubt, or seek direction from God a second time, when so clear and peremptory an answer had been already given? It appears, that, with all his knowledge, he had formed mean and dishonourable conceptions of the divine nature. What! shall the Eternal God change His purpose; or, to gratify the ambition or the avarice of an hypocrite, suffer those to be cursed, whom he had a little before declared to be blessed? Or, what business have we to deliberate, when our duty has been once determined? If we would maintain and prove our integrity, we must put away with abhorrence the very first disposition to sin. If we begin to dally with temptation, our enemy has gained an advantage, and it is probable we shall be overcome, for we are willing to yield. And if we cast about for pretences to do that, which we know to be wrong, what wonder if we be left to our own way, and then prevail upon ourselves to think it right?

Accordingly, Balaam obtained the leave which he had desired. The Lord permitted him, if called on, to go with the ambassadors upon this infamous service, still charging him to act agreeably to the directions he should receive. It is obvious, that the allowance was granted in displeasure: as God speaks concerning the Jews, who had cast off his government, and eagerly solicited a ruler to be placed over them, like the other nations of the world, "I gave thee a king in mine anger*."—O let us pray, that we may not be abandoned to the devices of our own hearts; and therefore, that God would defeat our purposes,

* Hof. xiii. 11.

and obstruct our path, rather than suffer us to take one step contrary to his will! But if we are secretly wishing for a licence to gratify some proud, covetous, lustful, or malicious disposition, it matters not that we consult God, or profess a determination to do as He would have us; for so did Balaam. With such a temper, not the most constant attention to the forms of religion, not the strongest pretences to fervency in devotion, will avail any thing. Respecting men of this character, the Lord God saith, "Should I be enquired of at all by them*?" Or, agreeably to his conduct in the instance we are considering, He may grant them the permission they desire; as if, to satisfy their hypocritical scruples, He should reply, "Go, and act as you please; it shall be according to your own mind."

Balaam readily caught at the opportunity offered him; for, without waiting to be called, he rose up in haste, probably big with the expectations of preferment, and accompanied the princes of Moab to their own land. But behold, he was suddenly stopped upon the road; for the Lord would not suffer him to proceed without a signal testimony of his displeasure. "God's anger was kindled, because he went: and the Angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him†." After some violent and fruitless efforts to push forward the beast, upon which he rode, "he was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet‡." This was a striking appearance, a most singular mi-

* Ezek. xiv. 3. † Num. xxii 22. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 16.

racle indeed. An animal, of all others the most stupid, was made use of, to reprove the wife of the earth. Still he was intent upon pursuing his journey, till "the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand," as if prepared to destroy him. And the Angel said, "Behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me." The dread of such an enemy, armed with vengeance, struck him to the ground, and extorted from him a confession of his guilt, and a conditional proposal of quitting his purpose: "I have sinned: now therefore if it displease thee, I will get me back again." In this pretended humiliation it appeared, that he was unwilling to renounce the object before him, as if he were still asking leave to go forward. Why else should he reply, "If it displease thee?" Could it be a matter of doubt, when the Lord had so expressly declared his anger against him? Permission, therefore, was granted him, as before; his way was no longer "fenced up that he could not pass;" but he was told that he might proceed according to his desire. At the same time he was warned, that his hopes of promotion might be disappointed, inasmuch as a restraint would be laid upon him, and words put into his mouth. With such an allowance, then, he prosecuted his journey.

Ah! how many, like Balaam, cry out "I have sinned," through the dread of punishment, while they see the flaming sword of justice ready to cut them down! How many promise amendment, if they cannot be saved without it, and testify, by their hesitation, that

that the love of sin retains its full power within them! They say perhaps, " I will get me back again," but their hearts are unchanged, because they still deliberate about the necessity of quitting their evil courses, and, if all prohibitions were removed, would gladly pursue their iniquity.

It is enquired, What blame was there in Balaam, since he acted agreeably to the leave that was given him? The same that there is in drunkards and adulterers, when they greedily run after their respective schemes of villany, against the convictions of their own minds, and obstinately continue therein, so long as the Lord puts no restraints upon them. They are allowed to do as they please: that is, God will not force them to abandon their wicked purposes; but He has sufficiently manifested his disapprobation; and their sin is not the less heinous, if He does not interpose to prevent it.

Yet in Balaam we do not discover, at the first, an avowed contempt of God. He probably flattered himself that he was upright, because he still professed a resolution of not going contrary to his duty. When the king of Moab met him, he declared with great firmness, " Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." Many costly sacrifices were offered up, and various preparations made, to propitiate the God of Israel, who condescended to visit Balaam, and suggested the prophetic speech he was to utter*. Nor did the Magician

* Num. xxiii. 1, &c.

pervert, or conceal the message, which it pleased God to send by him. He returned to Balak, and pronounced a benediction, not a curse, upon Israel; expressing his most earnest desire, that "he might die the death of the righteous, and that his last end might be like his."

Some of these circumstances seem to represent him in a favourable light. But why did he not immediately quit the horrid purpose, and start with abhorrence from any further attempts of imprecating evil upon the people, whom God had again affirmed to be the people of his choice, and the objects of his love? Herein the hypocrite is detected. He was willing to keep fair with Balak, that he might yet receive from him "the wages of unrighteousness;" and therefore, though constrained to confess the blessedness of Israel, to admire, and praise, and envy them, he set himself, at the request of the king, to seek for enchantments against them. This was none other than the most impious mockery of God, under the pretence of consulting his will. For what did he, but strive, by one method after another, to find that to be consistent with his duty, which, he was assured, was most displeasing to God? With a semblance of devotion (for he offered sacrifices, and retired in order to meet the Lord) he was soliciting permission to curse those, whom he knew to be the favourites of Heaven, that he might not be disappointed of his own covetous and ambitious designs.

This is indeed a detestable, yet not an uncommon, character. Many, who would start back with horror from

from an avowed determination to sin, and who profess an unshaken resolution to obey the divine command, whatever it may be, yet secretly wish for opportunities of gratifying their ungodly desires, and exercise their ingenuity to make such a licence appear lawful. Various pleas are urged, to justify that which the mind is set upon. Though the thing itself be clearly forbidden, and acknowledged to be wrong, yet it is alleged, "We are under peculiar circumstances of temptation;—In our case it may be allowable, at least for a particular purpose, to transgress; and no bad consequences, perhaps, may ensue;—we ask for the liberty only on this occasion;—and, if we should be blamable, our future life will sufficiently atone for it." What paltry excuses are these! And yet these, or such as these, are offered continually, in order to vindicate or extenuate acts of oppression, intemperance, uncleanness, and other vile practices. But surely they betray an unsound heart, destitute of every good principle.

Both the Magician, and the king who consulted him, were confounded in their schemes and expectations*. Enchantments were tried in vain. The Lord God declared again and again, by the mouth of the soothsayer, that Israel was blessed, and constrained him to confirm the benediction; till Balak's anger was kindled, and he cried out, with marks of vehement indignation, "I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I

* Num. xxiv. 1, &c.

thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the Lord hath kept thee back from honour." This was, evidently, a fore disappointment to Balaam; and yet he was compelled to persevere in admiring the happiness of Israel, and, under the powerful influence of the Spirit of prophecy, he foretold the future prosperity and extensive dominion of that people. In these predictions, among other very interesting and distant events in the Jewish history, we meet with a clear declaration of the coming of our glorious Redeemer (under the description of "the Star of Jacob and the Sceptre of Israel") and of the spiritual kingdom, which He would establish in the earth, to the utter destruction of all who should resist him*.

Do

* "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh; there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession: Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly: Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city." Num: xxiv. 17—19.

This passage, in its primary and literal meaning, intimates, that from the people of Israel should arise a mighty Prince, who would obtain an entire conquest and bear rule over the kingdoms of Moab and Edom: and it was fulfilled in David; for it is expressly recorded of him, that he finally subdued those nations, 2 Sam. viii. 2, 14. But, in its full import, it has invariably been considered as referring to that illustrious Personage, of whom David was a type and a progenitor. This explanation is perfectly consonant to many other prophecies concerning the Saviour, which, in similar language, describe Him as acquiring dominion over heathen countries, and destroying the enemies of his Church: and it is observable that, in several of these ancient predictions, some particular op-

posers,

Do we wonder at all this? It was certainly spoken contrary to the purpose of the Sorcerer, and is to be accounted for only by the immediate interposition of God, for the manifestation of his own glory. Nor is it an uncommon case for wicked men to act in contradiction to their wishes, through an awful impression of the fear of God, and in such a way as to shew, that they are under His irresistible restraint. Their consciences will often compel them to abandon their schemes, and to steer a course totally opposite to what they had at first designed. Or, the apprehensions of God's wrath will force them, for a time, into a kind of feigned obedience. To these principles

posers, as the Moabites and Edomites, are put for "the adversaries of the Lord" in general. Ps. ii. 8; lxxii. 8; cx. 6; Isa. xi. 14; xxv. 10.

Jesus, then, is "the Star" which Balaam foretold; "the bright and morning Star," which, "through the tender mercy of our God hath visited us;" Luke i. 78; Rev. xxii. 16: and to Him also "the Sceptre" of universal government is committed. "He shall have dominion;" for "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet;" 1 Cor. xv. 25. Balaam looked forward to the time of his coming, which is usually called, as here, verse 14, "the latter days;" and concerning Him he said, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh;" which might intimate, that His appearance was far removed, and that he should see Him only by the Spirit of prophecy. But it may also refer to the second advent of the Saviour, when indeed both Balaam and every despiser of His grace "shall see him" in his glory,— "shall behold him, but not nigh;" for they shall be driven out from him with shame and confusion, and "be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."

we ascribe the formalities of devotion, and the painful austerities, which some practise, while, in fact, they dislike the whole business of religion. They will frequently bear an honourable testimony to the Israel of God, and stand up in defence of the truth, even so as to subject themselves to much persecution for it, and yet remain strangers to its influence, and averse from its holy precepts.

It is not, therefore, a sufficient evidence of any real integrity in Balaam, that he spoke well of the people of God, and envied their happiness; that, in the views of death, he was more especially desirous to be numbered with them; or that he received divine communications, “heard the words of God, knew the knowledge of the most High, and saw the visions of the Almighty;” or even, that he could describe the character and offices of the great Redeemer. For all this is very consistent with an unrenewed heart, and with a fixed, habitual love of sin. There are not a few, who are determined to hold fast their iniquity, and yet entertain a strong regard for truly pious persons. They dare not, indeed, separate themselves from the world, like the faithful servants of Christ, whom they revere; but when they think of dying, and of entering on an eternal state, they would gladly part with all, to be found in the company and the condition of the righteous. This desire, however, has not an abiding influence upon them; for they obstinately persist in their covetous or sensual pursuits. Their convictions, then, of what is right will not excuse their conduct,

conduct, but, rather, aggravate their guilt, and make their case more hopeless.

From the example before us we may also learn, that we may have some proper notions of religion, and be able to give good advice to others, without receiving any real benefit ourselves. For, though we speak of Balaam as a Magician, he professed, it should seem, to worship the true God, but with a mixture of superstitious and profane arts. The prophet Micah informs us, that he preached to Balak concerning the insufficiency of all external rites and sacrifices, and the necessity of unfeigned and practical godliness*. The king of Moab, we are told, enquired what kind of service would be pleasing to God, and supposed that some costly expiations, or ceremonial methods of recommendation, would answer the purpose. But Balaam, like a faithful preacher of righteousness, instructed him, that God demands from us something of greater value than all these, and that no offerings can avail any thing without a constant obedience, especially in the important duties of justice, mercy, and genuine humility before God: “ He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God † ? ”—We doubt not, that there are many also among ourselves, who may be able to describe the nature of sound religion, and to make

* Mic. vi. 5—8.

† In vindication of this exposition of the passage, the Author refers to Bishop Butler’s ingenious sermon on the character of Balaam.

nice and accurate distinctions in its doctrines, while they detect the ignorance and gross mistakes of others, who yet feel nothing in themselves of the influence of real piety. For it should be remembered, that godliness consists, not so much in a well-digested system of right notions, as in holy and spiritual affections, regulating the whole conduct.

Is it thought strange, that God should reveal himself to a wicked man? Yet it is obvious, that by this interposition "He made his power known," in a very eminent degree, and spread among the nations the terror of his people. Nor is it a singular case. Many, besides Balaam, have seen visions, possessed miraculous gifts, and instructed others in their duty, who were never reconciled to God. "Saul also was among the prophets." Judas, that infamous traitor, who in the leading feature of his character resembled Balaam, was a preacher of the gospel, wrought miracles, and might, probably, be the instrument of bringing sinners to the knowledge of the Saviour. Many also will plead in the last awful day, before the judgment seat of Christ, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" To whom the Judge will answer, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*."

This, therefore, stands as a solemn admonition to all who profess Christianity, that they trust not to any formalities in religion, which they may practise, to any privileges with which they may be favoured, or to any

* Matt. vii. 22, 23.

discernment or abilities which may procure them esteem and admiration. Ah! what will these profit us, if we be proud, covetous, sensual, or malicious; if “our hearts be not right in the sight of God?” It is possible, that we may possess those gifts and faculties, which will be a benefit to others, while, through our own perverseness, they prove a curse to ourselves. Vain would be the boast of visions and revelations from heaven: for these are no more than Balaam had; and yet he remained a slave to one of the vilest passions, and, with inflexible obstinacy, against all his own convictions and the solemn warnings he had received, continued to oppose the cause of God. This will be more evident from considering the sequel of the history.

Though his schemes by enchantment failed, and he was constrained to pronounce the divine benediction upon Israel, he was still unwilling, it should seem, to abandon the flattering prospect of preferment, and therefore cast about for some other way, in which he might gratify the king of Moab, and accomplish his wicked purpose. Herein he succeeded more effectually, and betrayed a more thoroughly depraved disposition, than if he had cursed the Israelites by any form of imprecation, which could have been devised. No malediction from him could have been any real injury to them, since God had declared His blessing, and would not reverse it. But Balaam contrived, with diabolical subtlety and malice, to seduce them into the practice of iniquity, well knowing that God was their strength, and that nothing but sin could separate them

from Him. The young Moabitish women, being instructed by his advice to lay snares for the men of Israel, allured them to the commission of lewdness, and then of idolatry. The consequences were most awful indeed; and we are expressly assured, that Balaam was the main instrument in planning and promoting the horrid business*.

Ah! how many, of most eminent character, have fallen by the enticements of immodest women! We have another lamentable instance of the dreadful effects of incontinency, in Solomon, who therefore warns us from his own painful experience, "The lips of a strange woman drop as an honey-comb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: but her end is bitter as worm-wood, sharp as a two-edged sword: Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths: For she hath cast down many wounded, yea many strong men have been slain by her: Her house is the way to Hell, going down to the chambers of death†." —If We, then, would escape the danger, we must not only "flee fornication,"* but avoid the company of those, who, by their licentious principles or wanton behaviour, may tempt us to the sin.

But we look with peculiar detestation on the conduct of Balaam, who was the counsellor in this iniquitous transaction. We know not, by what base artifice he could reconcile it to his conscience. But the love of gain overcame him: and there are those, we fear, among ourselves, who "run greedily after the error of

* Num. xxv. 1, 2. xxxi. 16. Rev. ii. 14.

† Prov. v. 3, 4. vii. 25—27.

Balaam for reward*.” From various motives, indeed, men are endeavouring to corrupt others, and in that respect, are the agents and imitators of Satan, whose chief employment is to contrive and recommend schemes of wickedness. Great zeal is discovered, in every place, to seduce those, who appear truly devoted to God: and it is generally supposed, that the most effectual method is to allure them by vain pleasures and sensual gratifications. But may we not ask the seducer, “What complicated sin are you guilty of?” Do you pretend a friendship for those, whom you are tempting to transgress? Alas! you are practising the very worst cruelty, of which you are capable; you are studying to destroy them for ever. As far, therefore, as in you lies, you are committing murder, and that of the most heinous kind: and when God shall reckon with you, you will “lament and howl” for the wicked counsels you are now giving.

It remains only, that we remark the close of Balaam’s history. What, but the most miserable conclusion, could be expected, as he had acted so inconsistently with his avowed principles, in deliberate and firm opposition to God and his conscience? Though he had pronounced the Israelites the blessed of the Lord, he continued to seek their destruction. He had drawn them into the most flagrant offences, which brought down the heavy judgments of God upon them; and still, it should seem, he persisted in aiding and encouraging the Moabites to make war against them. For when, by the divine command, those de-

* Jude 11.

terminated enemies of God and his people were put to the sword, the Syrian soothsayer was found in their company, and slain in the general massacre. Vain were his desires to "die the death of the righteous," since he maintained his communications with the wicked; and therefore he was taken away with the transgressors by the just vengeance of an angry God*.

How solemn is the warning which this history suggests! It is possible, we see, to have a sort of religion, which may procure us esteem, and yet leave us under the influence of the vilest affections, exposed to the wrath of God. We perceive, from the character before us, that men may impose upon themselves by the most ingenious subtleties, to their own eternal ruin. They may form the best wishes and resolutions, and yet advance no farther. They may be tempted by "the wages of unrighteousness" to do what in their consciences they utterly condemn. They may have serious thoughts about death, and strong desires to be numbered with the Israel of God, especially in "their last end:" and yet, being companions of fools, they are destroyed for ever.—But "such as are of a contrite spirit," though destitute of the admired abilities which many hypocrites possess, ought not to be discouraged by this awful example. Their godly sorrow for sin, their earnest cries for mercy, their unfeigned devotedness to God, are the most unequivocal marks in their favour, which "the double-minded" cannot attain, and which are infinitely preferable to the finest endowments and most splendid talents.

* Num. xxxi. 8. Josh. xiii. 22.

It will become us all to examine our own state and character, to be faithful to our convictions, to prosecute our pious intentions, and to watch over our own hearts, lest the good impressions, now made upon them, should be effaced through sloth, or worldly cares, or sensual gratifications. Let us look around, and observe, who are the people in whom God delights, and with whom we should choose to have our portion for ever: With Them let us endeavour to cultivate a familiar intercourse, as far as our circumstances will permit. Why do we “halt between two opinions?” After a full deliberation, let us be determined and fixed; and having “counted the cost,” let us abide the consequences, whatever they may be. Do we dread the thought of perishing, as Balaam did? Let us devote ourselves to God in his Covenant, “without partiality and without hypocrisy:” So will He keep us from falling, and present us to himself, unblamable in holiness through Jesus Christ.

J O S H U A.

C H A P. XV.

S E C T. I.

Joshua, raised up for great services—his attendance on Moses—appointed to succeed him—encouraged by divine promises—led the people thro' Jordan—invested and conquered Jericho—subdued Ai—vindicated in his destruction of the Canaanites—regulated the government and divine service—his solemn exhortations before his death—a pattern to magistrates and masters of families.

THE providence of God has in no instance been more signally displayed, than in the peculiar care which He has exercised over his Church from one age to another. To this cause alone we ascribe the preservation and continuance of that favoured society, amidst all the commotions which have happened on the earth. Many attempts have been made, at different times, to extirpate it; and it has frequently been, to all human apprehension, in danger of being utterly destroyed. But our fears are quieted, while we hear a gracious voice proclaiming, “ I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day *.” The serious and attentive

* Isa. xxvii. 3.

reader of the scriptures will feel the truth of these observations, with a mixture of devout admiration, gratitude, and praise.

We are then more especially disposed to “tremble for the ark of God,” when we perceive the person removed, to whom the chief care of it was committed. But we ought to remember, that “The Lord reigneth;” that “He has the residue of the Spirit;” that he never wants means to accomplish his purpose, and therefore, though One of peculiar eminence and usefulness in the Church may be taken away, it is easy for Him to raise up another, who shall abundantly supply the loss. Let us be satisfied to leave the defence of his own Israel to Him.

While we were contemplating the character of Moses, we beheld that astonishing dispensation, the deliverance of the whole nation of the Hebrews from the bondage of Egypt, their passage through the Red sea, and their miraculous support and guidance in the wilderness for forty years. This indeed was “the Lord’s doing; and it is marvellous in our eyes.” But Moses was employed as the chief, we had almost said as the only, instrument of executing the wondrous plan; for the entire regulation of every thing was committed to him. Our fears, then, were excited, upon the removal of that illustrious person before the grand design was perfected. While the Israelites were yet on the other side of Jordan, and had not entered the promised land; while they were just preparing to attack their strongest and most formidable enemies; in that very critical and dangerous situation, their leader and
commander

commander was taken from them; and we were ready to ask, What now will become of Israel? Upon whom shall the important and arduous charge devolve? Who shall go in and out before the great congregation? Who shall be able to restrain their perverse and rebellious spirit, maintain the authority of a governor among them, or conduct them forth to war against all the powerful nations of Canaan?

Alas! we are ever prone to be hasty in our conclusions, through our shortsightedness and unbelief. Why should we doubt the exertions of an omnipotent, faithful, and gracious God, on behalf of his people? Who was it, that raised up Moses for their deliverance, and fitted him for every service to which he was called? Was it not He, whose "hand is not shortened?" And is not He sufficient to supply the necessities of his Church? Behold, therefore, as a mark of his attention to them, a successor was appointed, and Joshua, who had been previously qualified, was nominated by the Lord himself to undertake the charge, and to stand in the place of Moses.

The history of this man of God, whose character we are now to contemplate, is contained chiefly in the book which bears his name, written probably by himself. Here, though we read of battles and conquests, in which we may seem to have no concern, we shall perceive some of the divine perfections displayed and exercised in a very eminent degree. The power of God is exhibited, altering the course of nature for the defence of his people; His justice, taking signal vengeance on the wicked inhabitants of Canaan, when they

they had filled up the measure of their iniquities; His veracity, giving the Israelites the possession of Canaan, in completion of his promises and his holy Covenant; and His grace and mercy, encouraging and assisting them in all their difficulties, till he had granted them rest and deliverance from their enemies. These events were accomplished by the hand of Joshua, who will appear to us, in the whole of the transactions, as a person of singular excellence and abilities. But our regard must be raised higher than to Joshua: for we shall behold the Lord God of Hosts determining, as it were in a visible manner, the issues of war, and “dividing to the nations their inheritance.” May we learn to fear, and trust, and love “the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things!” And from an admiration and experience of his goodness, may we say, “Blessed be his glorious name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!”

In the books of Exodus and Numbers we observe Joshua placed in such a situation, and employed on such a business, as gradually prepared and fitted him for his important office: and in general we remark, that the Lord, who perfectly knows his own plans from the beginning, fixes his people in early life amongst those connections, which may qualify them for their future designation. Joshua was the servant, the constant attendant, and the intimate companion of Moses, throughout the forty years of their pilgrimage; and it is probable, that he reaped very great advantages from the instructions, example, and prayers of that eminent prophet.

prophet. It was Joshua, who fought with and conquered Amalek, while the hands of Moses were held up with importunate supplications for him*. To him was the peculiar honour granted, of going up with Moses to the mount of God, where he abode in a state of devout retirement for forty days, though it should seem that he was not received into the cloud†. From this instance, then, we learn, that valour and prowess in arms are not inconsistent with the most fervent piety. The same person may distinguish himself on the field of battle in the service of his country, and maintain the most familiar intercourse with God. He, who had “discomfited Amalek with the edge of the sword,” discovered an incessant regard to the duties of religion: “he departed not out of the tabernacle‡.” Probably, he had the care and direction of it, and dwelt either in or near to the holy place.

During his attendance upon Moses, when he had observed two of the seventy elders prophesying in the camp, as he conceived, without a proper authority, or in an irregular manner, he was displeased and said, “My lord Moses, forbid them§.” This might arise from a misguided zeal, and a strong attachment to his master, whose reputation, he might be afraid, would suffer by the growing popularity of others. Nor should we wonder to see even good men, at times, betray the symptoms of bigotry, pride, and envy.

He was sent upon the deputation to take a survey of the land of Canaan; and when the rest of the spies

* Exod. xvii. 9—13.

† xxiv. 13. xxxii. 17.

‡ xxxiii. 11.

§ Num. xi. 28.

returned with a most unfavourable report, whereby the Israelites were so terrified as to refuse to prosecute their march, Joshua discovered a singular firmness and courage. He joined with Caleb in opposing their perverse spirit, and represented the conquest of the country as not only practicable, but easy, if they would faithfully cleave unto the Lord. As a bold advocate for God, he cried out, in the very face of an enraged multitude, "Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not*." This he did at the hazard of his life; for he would have been instantly stoned to death, through the fury of the people, had not the Lord interposed to deliver him. For his zeal upon that occasion it was promised, that he and his associate alone should enter into Canaan. So true is it, "Them that honour God, He will honour †."

When Moses, being apprized of his dissolution, with much importunity intreated the Lord to provide him a successor, who should be competent for the office, "that the congregation of the Lord might not be as sheep which have no shepherd," Joshua was appointed by a divine commission to the important service ‡. He was then set apart for his very arduous employment by a public ordination: Moses placed him before the priest, put his hands upon him, and gave him a solemn charge, as from God himself, in the presence of the whole assembly. These affecting

Num. xiv. 9. † 1 Sam. ii. 30. ‡ Num. xxvii. 18, &c.
ceremonies

ceremonies were designed to impress the Israelites with an awe, which might dispose them to receive, reverence, and obey him as their Governor, and at the same time to inspire him with zeal and fortitude for his work. For thus said the Jewish Legislator, when taking his last leave of him: "Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee, he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed *."

Years before
Christ, 145.

Upon the removal of Moses, Joshua, being invested with the command of all Israel, as the minister of God, and by His express call and direction, entered on his post †. And here, we shall have reason to admire his faithfulness, diligence, and perseverance, his continual dependence upon God and entire devotedness to His glory, from his first appointment to the very day, when he laid down his office and his life together.

We need not observe, that the task assigned him was great and difficult. It is obvious, that he must perceive many causes of discouragement; such as, the perverseness and obstinacy of the nation who were committed to his government, the number and the strength of the enemies he had to contend with, and his own unworthiness and insufficiency for so immense an undertaking. But the special summons, given him from Heaven, were enough to over-rule every objec-

* Deut. xxxi. 7, 8.

† Josh. i. 1, &c.

tion : and the most gracious assurances of favour and assistance were added, in order to inspire him with a holy confidence. For thus said the Lord, " There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life : as I was with Moses, so will I be with thee : I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee : only be thou strong and very courageous." But, that he might " make his way prosperous, and have good success," he was strictly charged to pay a constant attention to the whole law of God, and to meditate therein day and night.

May not We also derive instruction from Joshua's commission? For, under the various difficulties which obstruct our path, and seem to forbid our entrance into Canaan, we are supported and comforted by " the exceeding great and precious promises" of a faithful God. If we are truly devoted to Him in his Covenant, He is as expressly engaged to us, as he was to Joshua; and under this Almighty protection we are no less secure, and may be no less confident, than the Jewish Captain. For the very declaration, addressed to him, is applied to Believers in general; " I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee:" So that we may boldly say, " The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me*." But we also, like Joshua, must attend to the divine command, and make the sacred oracles our invariable guide and constant companion, if we expect the presence and blessing of the Lord. We do not wonder, that some, who profess to follow Christ, are overcome, and that many

* Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

faint in the spiritual conflict, because they neglect the book of inspiration, and are at no pains to know what God would have them to do.

Thus being appointed to his office, instructed, and encouraged to discharge the duties of it, Joshua delayed not, but prepared the people for their passage over Jordan. The necessary orders were issued out for the purifying of the host, that they might be waiting, with a holy solemnity, for the Lord's miraculous interposition in their favour. Spies also were sent to take a view of the land, especially of Jericho, the town which stood first on the confines of Canaan: and, upon their report, the whole army removed, and encamped by the river*. And here we behold a wonderful exercise of faith: for, though there were no human means for their conveyance over Jordan, (which at that season of the year overflowed all its banks to a very wide extent) Joshua believed God, that He would "make a way," as he had done in a former instance, "for the ransomed to pass over," and with the utmost confidence exhorted the Israelites to expect it. The command was given, that the priests bearing the ark of the Lord (which was the symbol of His presence and Covenant) should advance the foremost, as a guide and security to all the congregation, who were directed to follow. When, therefore, the ministers of the Lord came to the brink of Jordan, the waters divided, and admitted them into the channel, as on dry ground. The people were then encouraged to tread in their steps; and with perfect safety they went

* Josh. ii. & iii. 1, &c.

through the river, while the very waves formed a wall of defence unto them. The priests, who carried the ark, halted by the divine injunction in the midst of Jordan, nor removed from their place, till all the company of the Israelites were landed on the other side*. This circumstance was intended to confirm their faith, as a token of their preservation through the deep: for the Lord thus pledged himself, as it were, for their protection: His ark must perish, before an Israelite can be destroyed.

We also have the same guidance and security: "The Lord of the whole earth," who conducted them, has promised to be with us. And if He be pleased to accompany us, we need not fear to go forwards; though many difficulties, as formidable as the waters of Jordan, may withstand our progress. Do you follow the ark? Then hear that merciful declaration, which is addressed to you, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee †." In dependence on the faithfulness of God, you may walk with confidence "through the valley of the shadow of Death," because He is with you, and has engaged for your safe arrival in the heavenly Canaan. You have an invincible defence in the Covenant of grace. "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks ‡." He interposes himself between you and danger, and says, for your encouragement in the midst of troubles, "Because I live, ye shall live also §."

* Josh. iv. 10, &c.

† Isa. xliii. 2.

‡ xxvi. 1.

§ John xiv. 19.

In this amazing dispensation, we perceive a singular honour put upon Joshua. The Lord admitted him to familiar converse, and, by making him the instrument of performing these wonders, secured to him the reverence and obedience of all the people. "On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses all the days of his life." At his word the priests quitted their station in the channel of Jordan, and brought up the ark of the Lord; when, instantly, the streams returned to their accustomed place, and flowed over all the banks, as before. Joshua, then, appeared as the minister of Jehovah, throughout the whole of this transaction; and the praise is due, not to the man, but to Him, who has all nature at his command, and employs all creatures as he pleases, to execute his own purpose. What cannot He accomplish? What is he not disposed to bestow upon those who serve him? Or, what may they not expect at his hands? We have seen, that He can draw rivers out of the flinty rocks, and turn the deep waters into dry ground.

So signal an interposition demanded from the Israelites the warmest acknowledgments, and deserved to be had in remembrance by their posterity, who might hereby be encouraged to trust, and love, and glorify the God, who had done so great things for their nation. To commemorate the event, then, Joshua was directed to set up a monument, composed of twelve stones taken out of the midst of Jordan, which might be a public and perpetual memorial of the divine power and mercy exerted on the behalf of Israel, and transmit
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some important instructions to succeeding generations. —And are not We under equal obligations to celebrate the loving kindness of our God? For “He hath done marvellous things,” for his Church in general, and for ourselves in particular. Do we not look back, with devout and grateful astonishment, on the many gracious dispensations of Providence in our favour? Shall we not raise a pillar, with an inscription to the praise of our God, who has conducted us through innumerable dangers and distresses, in so wonderful a way? For “hitherto the Lord hath helped us,” as much as he did his saints of old. O the gross stupidity and base ingratitude of men, who perceive not His hand, and will not acknowledge His goodness in their frequent deliverances!

Is it enquired, What became of Joshua, upon his triumphant entrance into Canaan? After the various miracles, which the Lord had wrought for Israel, and by which he had fully testified, that they acted under His express direction and commission, we might have expected that all the nations would immediately submit themselves unto them. For surely it is vain, as well as wicked, to fight against those, whom the Lord of Hosts has promised to preserve, and empowered to conquer. The Canaanites, indeed, were struck with terror; as the spies, who had been sent to Jericho, reported, that a general consternation had taken place among them*. But when they heard, how the waters of Jordan had been divided, “their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more because of

* Josh. ii. 24.

the children of Israel*.” And yet they prepared for opposition. In them, therefore, we have an awful representation of the state of sinners, who harden themselves against God, and maintain a presumptuous conflict, though they know that they cannot prosper. Not unfrequently, they feel an apprehension of that tremendous destruction which awaits them, and tremble through the forebodings of it: yet they do not repent, but rather are the more desperate in their evil courses, and rush on, as it were with steady purpose, to meet their damnation.

Joshua, then, had nothing to expect but the most determined resistance. But, before he girded himself for the battle, he made a solemn stand upon his entrance into Canaan, and, in the divine ordinances, renewed the dedication of himself and the people to the Lord. The sacraments of circumcision and the pass-over were administered, and thus, while they professed their entire devotedness to God, they sought his blessing and protection. Then they received immediate proofs of his faithfulness: they began to eat the produce of the country; and the manna, with which they had been miraculously supplied till that time, being no longer wanted, ceased.—An attention to religious institutions is, in all situations, necessary, but particularly so in the prospect of difficulties, and upon the undertaking of any important business. Our first application should be to God, if we would prosper in the way wherein he sends us. We also, as well as his ancient saints, are favoured with sacraments of his ap-

* Josh. v. 1, &c,

pointment, which are the seals of his Covenant: let us beware of neglecting them; and, in the devout use of the means which he hath ordained, let us make a fresh and unfeigned surrender of ourselves to Him, looking for the completion of his promise.

The Lord will be found of them who wait for him. Joshua, therefore, was assured of the divine regard, by an express message from Heaven. While he was taking a survey of Jericho, he was surprised with a bright appearance: The Lord Jehovah, the great "Angel of the Covenant," presented himself to the Jewish leader, as a man of war, and declared, that he was come for the defence of Israel, as "Captain of the Lord's host *." Joshua, probably, might be filled with distressing apprehensions, when he beheld the well-fortified city, which trusted in the strength of its walls and bulwarks, and seemed to bid defiance to every assault. The Lord, therefore, who knows all the wants and the fears of his people, vouchsafed most seasonably to support and encourage his servant. "See,"

* It is evident, that the person, who revealed himself to Joshua, was superior to any created Being. For He suffered Joshua to worship him, and commanded him (as Jehovah did Moses at the burning bush) to put off his shoes, in token of the divine presence; and He is also expressly called THE LORD, or Jehovah, vi. 2. The Angel, then, whom Joshua saw, is "the Angel of the Covenant," whose appearance at different times to the ancient Patriarchs might intimate his future incarnation. It was He, who conversed with Moses, and conducted the Israelites through the wilderness; and the title which he here assumed of "Captain of the Host of the Lord," is perfectly suitable to the description of the Saviour.—See the next section.

said He, " I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour*."

But how shall the siege be conducted? The reduction of this proud fortress was intended, in a signal manner, to display the power of God on the behalf of Israel; and yet the mode of attack was so contrived, as to prove the faith and obedience both of Joshua and of all his army. The directions were given from the Lord himself. It was ordered, that a solemn procession should be made round about Jericho, by all the armed men, and by seven priests before the ark of the Covenant blowing with seven trumpets of rams horns, and that the rearward should follow the ark. The same method was to be used, once in each day, for a week together; with this only difference, that on the last of the seven days it was to be repeated seven times. The people were all enjoined to be perfectly silent, so that not a word was to be spoken, till the concluding circuit on the seventh day; and then, at the command of Joshua, they were to shout aloud in confidence of victory, without any direct assault whatever.

The whole of the process, we apprehend, appeared utterly ridiculous to the inhabitants of Jericho, who must have condemned them for extreme folly and madness, in expecting any effect from it. And had not the Israelites looked immediately to God for success, they would scarcely have adopted, what must have been thought in itself, an unmeaning and contemptible ceremony. Alas! if we begin to question

* vi. 2, &c.

the precepts of God, and refuse our obedience to them, wherever we cannot perceive the reasons, or foresee the probable advantages of them, what do we, but discover our ignorance and presumption? Is not the great God of heaven at liberty to choose his own mode of proceeding, without approving it to us? And is it not his prerogative, and his usual conduct, to bring about the most wonderful events by means, in themselves, weak and insignificant? This He does, to magnify his power, to exercise the faith of his people, and to abase the pride of man. What can be more important and glorious than the saving of an immortal soul, the rescuing of a sinner from the bondage of Satan, and "from the wrath to come?" Yet this amazing deliverance is generally accomplished by a method, which may appear to some as ridiculous as the blowing of the trumpets, or the shouting of the Jewish army. But it has pleased the divine wisdom, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds:" It is our duty therefore, to use them in an humble dependence on Him, who alone can make them effectual.

This firm reliance upon God, and patient obedience to his command, we perceive in Joshua, who punctually observed the ceremony prescribed, strange as it might seem, and at the conclusion of it, according to the order he had received, cried out, "Shout, for the Lord hath given you the city." And immediately, on the shout of the people, the proud fortresses of Jericho fell

fell down to the ground, its inhabitants were confounded, and became an easy prey to the Israelites. The town was ransacked, and burned with fire; all who dwelt in it were put to the sword, save only the family of Rahab, who believed God, and had treated the Hebrew spies with kindness; the very spoil of the wicked city was committed to the flames (except that the silver and the gold, the brass and the iron were preserved for the treasury of the Lord's house); and the place was condemned to a perpetual desolation. A curse was pronounced upon the man, who should ever attempt to rebuild it; and the imprecation had its completion, after many ages, in Hiel the Bethelite*.

Thus "BY FAITH the walls of Jericho fell down †." And while we are actuated by the same divine principle, we have nothing to dread from our strongest enemies. This very signal victory, designed to inspire the Israelites with courage, should also confirm our dependence upon God, and animate us to face every danger. What, though difficulties, to our apprehension as insuperable as the fortifications of Jericho, should oppose us; the Lord of Hosts, under whose banner we fight, can instantly remove them. "For He bringeth down them that dwell on high, the lofty city he layeth it low: he layeth it low, even to the ground; he bringeth it even to the dust ‡."

The conquest of Jericho tended to establish the reputation of Joshua, and rendered him an object of terror through all the country. But his triumph was

* 1 Kings xvi. 34.

† Heb. xi. 30.

‡ Isa. xxvi. 5.

soon interrupted; for the glory, he had acquired, was immediately succeeded by a shameful defeat. Israel was repulsed in their attack upon Ai, some of them were slain in their retreat, and all the rest were thrown into the utmost consternation*. This was a sore trial indeed; distressing beyond measure to Joshua, who, not without some mixture of impatience and distrust, began to fear for the event, and complained unto God. But was there not a cause? If the Lord forsake his people, it will become them to examine, what hath provoked Him to depart. "Israel had sinned." One at least of their company, Achan, "coveting an evil covetousness," had secreted for himself some part of the spoil of Jericho, which was prohibited; and on that account their protection was withdrawn, till the offence should be acknowledged, and marked with the severest vengeance.

Do we not perceive, that the Lord is jealous of his honour, and that he will not suffer a contempt of his commands, in what may seem to us our most trifling concerns, to pass with impunity? Even his faithful servants, if tempted to put forth their hands to any unclean thing, shall smart for their folly. "If they regard iniquity in their heart, the Lord will not hear them†," but will withhold from them his gracious presence, and give their enemies an advantage over them. "A goodly Babylonish garment, or shekels of silver and gold" have been a fatal snare to others, as well as to Achan, who have "pierced themselves

* Josh. vii. 1, &c.

† Psal. lxi. 18.

through with many sorrows," and brought confusion and distress into the camp of Israel. This surely is a loud call to us, to beware of covetousness.

What, though the sin be of a secret nature, and so contrived as to elude all human observation; there is an eye, which penetrates into the inmost recesses; the Lord, "who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins," cannot be imposed on. It should seem that the offence of Achan was unknown to the Israelites, and that they had not entertained the least suspicion of him. But, by the divine appointment, he was dragged forth to public view, and condemned to the most ignominious death, as an example to others.—Shall not we, then, fear before this holy Lord God? If we are desirous, that He should fight for us, we must "search the camp," and, with the utmost strictness, put away the accursed thing. For then He will take part with us against all our adversaries. Thus he returned to Joshua and his people, with the most gracious assurances of favour; and, by His direction, Ai, which had before been attacked without success, was immediately subdued and destroyed*.

We shall remark in the conduct of the Jewish leader, not only the firmest courage as a soldier, but, what is perfectly consistent with it, the most serious and constant regard to religion. After the victories he had obtained, instead of pushing on his advantages against the Canaanites, he made a solemn pause, erected an altar, and presented sacrifices to the Lord: and then, accord-

* Josh. viii. 1, &c.

ing to the injunctions of Moses, he read, in the ears of all the congregation of Israel, the blessings and the curses of the law, which also were engraven on stones, and left recorded upon the two neighbouring mountains Ebal and Gerizim*.—Nor let it be considered by persons of the most exalted rank, as a derogation from their dignity, to attend to the service of the God of heaven, when they observe Joshua directing the devotions of this numerous host. Let no pleas of business, or inconvenient situation, be allowed in excuse for the neglect of prayer and public worship, while they perceive “the thousands of Israel” halting in the midst of an enemy’s country, and laying aside the weapons of war, in order to bow before the Lord, and to be instructed in his word.

We do not attempt to follow the Hebrew General, leading his victorious troops from one encampment to another. Under the guidance and protection of the Lord Almighty, he pursued his conquests, subdued the strongest cities of Canaan, confounded and destroyed the princes, who were confederate against him, and put all the inhabitants to the sword†. Desolation was spread throughout the land, and, in a short time, thirty one kings were defeated and slain. In every fresh danger the Lord encouraged his faithful servant by renewed promises of favour and support, and, as it were in a visible manner, “fought for Israel.” This He did, in order to prove that this mighty army was sent by Himself, and acted under His commission, while they executed vengeance on the idolatrous Canaanites.

* Deut. xi. 29.

† Josh. ix.—xii.

For those abandoned sinners were consumed, not only by the hand of the Israelites, but by the immediate interposition of God, “who cast down great stones from heaven upon them, and they died: they were more which died with hail-stones, than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword*.” A signal honour also was conferred upon Joshua, and it appeared, that he was no other than the vicegerent of Jehovah; since at his command those two bright luminaries, the sun and the moon, were arrested in their courses, and the day was miraculously protracted, till his adversaries were destroyed. What words were those for a man to utter, “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou moon, in the valley of Ajalon!”—“And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies.”—We pause in admiration, not only of the power of God, who can change the whole order of nature according to his sovereign pleasure, but likewise of the faith of Joshua, which could ask and expect such wonders to be performed.

Throughout this history, we should pay a particular regard to the completion of the divine promises. For it had been declared in various revelations to Abraham and his children, as also to Moses, that Canaan should be given to Israel for a possession, and that all its inhabitants should perish for their iniquities. After so many proofs, therefore, of the faithfulness of God, shall we be backward to credit his word? Yet do not our fears and suspicions imply a sad defect in our

* Josh. x. 11.

affiance upon Him? Are we not afraid to trust ourselves in his hands? Or, do not our hearts misgive us, as if he would desert us at the last? How base is such a disposition! Is there an instance to be produced, in which He has failed his believing people, or departed from his engagements? If, then, we have "taken hold of his Covenant" in Christ Jesus, we may, we should expect, with the most cheerful confidence, whatever He has pledged himself to bestow.—But, in the awful desolation of the Canaanites, sinners should perceive the terrors of his justice, and tremble for their danger. Behold, then, that "our God is a consuming fire." Will you deny, that He will punish, when you see such tremendous displays of his vengeance? If you despise the offers of his grace, his wrath, which is long delayed, will fall upon you in full weight and measure. He may suffer you to follow your own way, till you be "fitted to destruction," but then there will be no escape.

The conduct of Joshua towards the Canaanites has been severely censured, as inhuman and tyrannical. But in the objection it seems to be forgotten, that, if cruelty be chargeable any where, it must be imputed to God. The massacre of those nations, who were infamous for every species of wickedness, was appointed and commanded by the righteous Judge of all, as a public and perpetual testimony of His indignation against their abandoned practices. He himself constantly declared it to be such; which was a sufficient proof, that it did not proceed from an imperious or sanguinary disposition in the conquerors, who acted
only

only according to the divine commission with which they were intrusted*. Shall we, then, presume to call in question the right which God has of punishing sinners; or shall we dictate to Him, in what way that punishment should be inflicted? Famine, pestilence, fire, and earthquakes are the instruments of his vengeance; and when He is pleased to make use of these for the purposes of his government, they produce desolations not less tremendous than those, of which the Israelites were the authors. And why may not the latter, as well as the former, be employed to do his will, if He shall so appoint? They knew and professed themselves to be no other than the executioners of that sentence, which the most High and Holy God had pronounced against the Canaanites; and therefore they were not at liberty to withhold the stroke of justice. By the same authority, they seized upon the whole country for their own inheritance, which, without such a licence, they could not have taken to themselves, but by the most shameless violation of common equity.

But may not Joshua's conduct be pleaded as a precedent for unprovoked wars, and a wanton destruction of the conquered? No: unless those, who would urge this plea, can exhibit the same credentials of a commission from Heaven, which were evidently given to Joshua.

By this remarkable dispensation the Lord designed to manifest his own glorious perfections, and to excite the surrounding nations to reverence and to worship

* Josh. xi. 15, 20.

him. It was also intended to preserve his people from idolatry, by removing those, who would have been continually tempting them to sin, and likewise by impressing their minds with a deep sense of the heinousness of those offences, for which the Canaanites were made an example of vengeance.—But we pretend not to answer all the proud and impious objections of infidels, who are determined not to be convinced. We will warn them, however, that, while they are cavilling with the word or ways of God, they are hastening to a destruction infinitely more terrible, than that of the Canaanites. They will also quarrel with this appointment. Be it so. The great God will vindicate his authority, and assert his right of punishing, by the final and everlasting damnation of all such, as continue to oppose him.*

We have been contemplating Joshua as a man of war, as the wise General, the brave Soldier. But he will appear no less worthy to be admired in a peaceful situation, wherein he shone as an active Magistrate, and a pious Prophet. No sooner had the Lord given him rest from his enemies, and confirmed him in the quiet possession of Canaan, than he divided the country by lot, according to the divine injunction, among the different tribes of Israel. To prevent confusion, and to guard against contentions, the distinct boundaries were pointed out, and the government was adjusted, conformably to the directions he had received. But the principal object of his concern was to establish the nation in the fear and the pure worship of God. We observe with delight the most indubitable proofs of

his zeal and fervour in religion. We have already seen him praying for, and preaching to, the people on mount Ebal: and, as soon as their outward circumstances permitted, provision was made for the stated celebration of God's service. The tabernacle was set-up with great solemnity by the whole congregation of Israel at Shiloh, where the public ordinances continued to be administered for above three hundred years*. The same devout spirit was manifest in all his deportment. When the two tribes and a half, at the conclusion of the war, returned to their settlement beyond Jordan, the venerable commander dismissed them with his blessing, and "charged every one of them, as a father doth his children:" "Take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul†."

Years before
Christ, 1427.

We hasten to the close of his life, which was truly honourable, and in which we discover the sincerity and the ardour of his piety. Here we behold the departing saint, burning with eager desire to promote the glory of God and the spiritual welfare of surviving friends, and supporting to the last the dignity of his character. When he was in daily expectation of his death, at the advanced age of one hundred and ten years, he twice assembled the congregation of Israel, with all their elders and officers, that he might instruct, exhort, encourage, and admonish

* Josh. xviii. 1. † xxii. 5.

them;

them; and thus he endeavoured to render them the most essential service, by confirming them in the knowledge, love, and worship of God*. While he took a most solemn leave of them, he was solicitous to improve his influence to the best purposes, and, therefore, pressed them by every argument “to cleave unto the Lord, to fear him, and to serve him in sincerity and truth.” He called to their remembrance the wonderful works which God had wrought for them, that he might excite in them a sense of gratitude; and that he might establish their faith, he set before them the blessings they might still expect from a faithful God. He testified, and appealed to them for the truth of it, that all the divine promises had been fulfilled to them; and he declared further, that the heaviest judgments, which were denounced, would be inflicted in case of their disobedience. From such considerations he exhorted them to maintain a continual watchfulness over themselves, and to persevere, with a holy courage and steadfastness, in the way of righteousness; and warned them to beware of turning aside in any measure to the practices of the heathen, and of forming connections with them. At the conclusion of his last address, he intreated them to weigh well what God demanded of them, and to make a deliberate choice, respecting their religion; adding, whatever might be Their purpose, it was His fixed determination, that he together with his household would serve the Lord.

The person, age, authority, and dying circumstances of the preacher, as well as the ardour with which he

Josh. xxiii. 1, &c. xxiv. 1, &c.

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spoke,

spoke, could not but affect the audience, who, therefore, professed the strongest resolutions of adhering to the pure worship of God. Still the prophet, suspecting, it should seem, some insincerity or unsteadiness, cautioned them against hypocrisy, and required them, in proof of their integrity, to seal their vows, by entering into an express covenant with the Lord. This was accordingly done, and the solemnity left an abiding impression upon the people in favour of true piety: and thus, as the life of Joshua had been extensively useful, his death was exceedingly honourable. It is recorded to his praise, that "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua." What a blessing to society and to the Church of God is such an example! The removal, therefore, of so eminent a saint is no less than a public calamity.

May not the character before us be proposed as a pattern to kings, and to all who are in authority? How desirable is it to see power exercised for the glory of God, and for the advancement of real godliness! Or, will any presume to allege, that religious concerns ought not to interfere, or to be regarded, in the administration of government? Alas! how widely different are human politics from the word of God, which declares, that "righteousness exalteth a nation*!" Those should be esteemed as the best friends of their country, who exert their influence for the suppression of sin, and the encouragement of holiness. Nor is this the business of magistrates alone: there is not one,

* Prov. xiv. 34.

intrusted with a family, who is not bound to say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." May such a determination be formed in the heart of every master, and of every parent, who shall cast their eyes upon these pages! How else will you give account of the important charge, which is committed to you? O let not your children and your servants be witnesses against you! Nor let the careless and profane conduct of others direct your practice. Though you should be derided and despised as precise and singular, be not afraid or ashamed to pray with and instruct all those, who are under your care; for thus only will you prove, that you feel the worth of your own souls.

The departure of Joshua, we have seen, was most glorious. Who would not wish to die, like this eminent saint, counselling, encouraging, and earnestly soliciting, every surviving friend to cleave unto the Lord? And have we not known or heard of many in our day, who have testified, with their last breath, that they have served a faithful and a gracious Master, that all the promises have been fulfilled, and that "not one good thing hath failed?" Are we not hereby convinced more firmly of the truth and excellence of religion, while we perceive what support and confidence it can administer, when every earthly comfort is about to be withdrawn? Are we not animated to persevere in a continual devotedness to God, from the expectation, that We also shall finish our course with joy?

But how terrible the case of the sinner, who "is driven away in his wickedness!" What testimony can he bear? Or what encouragement can He give to others? Would He most importunately request his friends and his children to follow him? Or are there any to bless His memory? "When the wicked perish, there is shouting*."——O that the God of all grace may rouse the impenitent from their wretched stupidity, awaken them with a sense of their danger, and reveal his Salvation to them! Thus will they live and die with happiness to themselves, and with usefulness to others; and, when the Israel of God shall be brought to the heavenly Canaan, they also shall enter with great triumph into the promised and purchased inheritance, Amen.

* Prov. xi. 10.

JOSHUA

A TYPE OF CHRIST.

SECT. 2.

Joshua prefigured the Saviour, as Captain of the Lord's hosts—called by the same name—like Him, sent by a divine commission—qualified for his office—conducted the people—subdued their enemies by feeblest means—spared and received those, who would submit—destroyed his opposers—made his followers to triumph, and fixed them in the promised inheritance.

It is the principal design of these practical reflections on Scripture Characters, to point out the excellencies and defects of each example, that, while we censure the latter and admire the former, we may the better rectify our own conduct. But besides this mere historical improvement of the sacred records, we have occasionally attempted to derive another advantage from them, by instituting a comparison between some of the most eminent saints and the pattern of all righteousness, the Lord Jesus Christ. For in them is exhibited a representation of the offices which He sustains, and of the power, grace, and faithfulness, which He has displayed, in the Redemption of his people. Such persons, we say, were types of Christ, or figures, which contain a resemblance of Him, in some or other of his

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perfections,

perfections, in the work He has undertaken, or in the benefits He bestows.

It must be confessed, that the subject requires much judgment and discretion, as well as pious affections. A wild and unrestrained imagination would be particularly mischievous here. We lament, that certain expounders of the scriptures, with the best intentions, have done little more than indulge their own foolish reveries; and thereby the truths of God, which they profess to recommend, are exposed to contempt. But while we are aware of this danger, and desire to avoid it, we apprehend, that we have sufficient authority for the typical interpretation of many of those ancient histories recorded in the Bible. For this purpose, therefore, we resume the life of Joshua, in many parts of which we shall perceive an allusive representation of the Saviour, of the commission with which He is invested, and of the mighty work which he performs for the salvation of his people.

Our meditations on these things, we trust, will not be destitute of profit or delight, as they will tend to give us clearer and more enlarged conceptions of the glory, power, and love of Christ. Is not this He, to whom we have resigned the care, and government, and protection of our souls? Will it not, therefore, confirm our faith, enliven our hope, and excite the most fervent gratitude and joy in our hearts, to observe, that in Jesus we have a Prince of most exalted dignity, an infallible Guide, an invincible Defender? For, what Joshua was to the tribes of Israel, our Jesus is to the universal Church. He himself has asserted his right to
that

that title, "THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST." In this very character he appeared to Joshua, when meditating the siege of Jericho, and the same office he yet continues to sustain for his believing people, whom he calls out to an honourable warfare, and engages to make victorious over all their enemies. Accordingly, He is described by an ancient Prophet as "A Leader and Commander," and by an Apostle as "The Captain of our salvation*."

It ought not to pass unobserved, that the Jewish Governor was distinguished by the same name as the great Redeemer of the world, undoubtedly with a reference to Him; whence, however different the language be, in which it is expressed, the meaning and the interpretation are one. If the Greeks write JESUS, and the Hebrews JOSHUA, they both intend the divine SAVIOUR. In two passages, therefore, we read JESUS, where the Israelitish General is intended, and the word should, more properly, have been translated JOSHUA†.

But, not to insist on the name, we consider the arduous employment, to which they were respectively appointed. Moses was not permitted to conduct the Israelites into the promised land; but that peculiar honour was reserved for Joshua, who was raised up for the very purpose. Nor ought we to forget, that none but Jesus can put us into the possession of heaven. As Moses was a guide to Israel for a time, so may the law be "our school-master, to bring us unto Christ‡." But what the law cannot do, that He

* Isa. lv. 4. Heb. ii. 10. † Acts vii. 45. Heb. iv. 8.

‡ Gal. iii. 24.

is able to effect, and pledges himself for the performance of it.

This was an office, which Joshua did not take to himself; but he was expressly called to it, and invested with it, by the highest authority. He received his commission immediately from God, and entered upon his work with the strongest assurances of the divine direction and support.—Our exalted Leader, in like manner, was constituted the Head of the Church by a particular designation; and therefore he declared, that “He came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him*.” Though, according to his original state, he was equal with God, and possessed the same glory as the Father, yet he submitted, for our sakes, to become a servant; and in his mediatorial character, as if he had been an inferior, he was set apart for his great undertaking, and furnished with full powers for the execution of it. In his human nature he was capable of feeling weakness and fear; and therefore promises of comfort and assistance were given him, that he might not faint under the weight of his charge. For thus spake Jehovah, “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth.—I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand; and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles†.” Jesus, then, was sustained by the Godhead, and thus “travelled in the greatness of his strength;” nor did he cease from his work, till he said, “It is finished.”

* John vi. 38. † Isa. xlii. 1, 6.

The Israelites had the strongest evidence, that their Captain was placed over them by a divine commission, and, if any one of them had denied his authority, or refused obedience to his command, the transgressor would have been liable to the severest punishment. We also are favoured with testimonies more numerous, clear, and indubitable, that our Jesus is “a Prophet come from God,” nay that he is no other than “THE LORD FROM HEAVEN,” and that, as such, he has an incontestable claim to our unfeigned regard and submission. He could confidently appeal to a long train of miracles, in proof of his mission and character. The Gospel, therefore, does not barely solicit, but demand, our cordial assent and compliance on pain of eternal damnation; and those, who reject it, after a proposal of its offers, will be left without excuse. “See, then, that ye refuse not Him that speaketh*.” For a voice from heaven proclaims, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him†.”

Is it allowed, that Joshua was qualified for his office, as being possessed of all necessary abilities? And shall we not maintain, that Jesus was every way fitted for his great undertaking? His power, wisdom, love, and faithfulness, have all been demonstrated with such unquestionable evidence, as forbids us to harbour any dishonourable thoughts of him. We rejoice, then, that “He is able to save to the uttermost,” that “He will finish the work in righteousness,” and that “He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judg-

* Heb. xii. 25.

† Matt. xvii. 5.

ment in the earth," and fully accomplished the salvation of all who believe.

If we pursue the history of Joshua, we shall perceive an instructive representation of the benefits, which we expect to derive from the guidance and the care of Jesus. When the people were first committed to his charge, after their tedious pilgrimage, they had the land of promise in their view, but yet the deep and overflowing waters of Jordan opposed their entrance into it: and, had they not been supported by a firm reliance upon God, they might still have sunk down in despair. But it was sufficient for them, that the Lord had appointed them a Leader, by whom He would bring them into Canaan, whom, therefore, it was their chief concern to follow and obey. Under the direction of Joshua the waves divided, and Jordan itself afforded them a safe and comfortable passage to the inheritance, they had long and eagerly desired.

The application is obvious. This world is a wilderness, in which, like weary pilgrims, we wander for a season. We have the prospect, indeed, of a glorious kingdom, but before we can be admitted into it, we must go "through the valley of the shadow of death," which may not improperly be compared to the deep waters of Jordan. How terrible does it appear! Who does not shrink back from it with dismay? If we presume to set forward without our Guide, we sink, we perish. But let us not forget, Who undertakes to lead us. Jesus himself has gone before, and engages to conduct us in perfect security. Let us
arise

arise at his call, nor fear to tread, where He shall point out the way, and we shall see greater things than the Israelites did. How many have already experienced his faithfulness, and encourage us to rely upon his care! One says, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me*." Another testifies, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever†." A third declares, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy Salvation‡." A fourth exults in the view of his dissolution, and cries out, "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ:—For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day§."

But was not such confidence as this peculiar to ancient times? No: the same knowledge of the Saviour, the same dependence on him, will produce the same effects in every age. There have been many, within our own observation, who, following the guidance of Jesus, and trusting in his protection, though standing on the banks of Jordan, have been able to smile, and sing, and triumph. Nor is this assurance to be condemned as presumption, since it arises from a persuasion of the sufficiency of Christ, and from an entire reliance upon his promise. Do any therefore, who have believed in his name, tremble at the apprehension

* Psal. xxiii. 4. † lxxiii. 26. ‡ Luke ii. 29, 30.

§ 1 Cor. xv. 57. 2 Tim. i. 12.

of their departure? We encourage you to be of good comfort: "O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?" Only "commit the keeping of your souls to Jesus in well-doing;" and then fear not the deep waters which obstruct you; but "lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

We shall perceive another resemblance of our exalted Leader, in a different point of view, if we accompany the Jewish Commander in the war which he maintained against the Canaanites. He was taught to expect a severe conflict; for, though he was placed at the head of a numerous host, he had to contend with enemies, who were far superior both in number and power. But he was assured, that not a man should be able to stand before him; and it is beautiful to behold his undaunted courage and unwearied exertions, in behalf of Israel, while he conducted his army from one conquest to another.

But our eyes are unto Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, who art "the Captain of our Salvation." Thou hast set up the standard of thy cross, and directed all, who would follow thee, to "gird themselves unto battle:" We, therefore, desire to give in our names to thee, that we may be thy "faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives end." But "we have no might against that great company, that cometh against us, neither know we what to do." "O Lord, undertake for us," and go forth with us against them that oppose us; for "vain is the help of man. Through thee we shall do valiantly; for thou wilt tread down our enemies." We read and hear of thousands of thy
faints,

faints, whom thou hast enabled to "fight the good fight," and to finish their warfare in a glorious and triumphant manner: O Lord, inspire us with the same ardour, which they possessed; make us, like them, "faithful unto death;" and then, of thine infinite mercy, bestow upon us "the crown of life!"

The Israelites, we have seen, advanced under the command of Joshua against the strong and fortified city of Jericho, and attempted its reduction by a most uncommon mode of attack. For who would have thought, that the blast of rams horns and the shout of a multitude would have brought down the high walls and bulwarks?—Not less singular, nor less efficacious, are the means, by which Jesus, who conducts his people "against principalities and powers," "pulls down their strong holds," enters even into the palace of the proud usurper, and, "overcoming him, taketh from him all his armour, wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils*." The preaching of the Gospel, weak and contemptible as it may appear, though not recommended "with excellency of speech or of wisdom," nor enforced by human power, has accomplished wonderful events, not less surprising than the conquest of Jericho. Many presumptuous opposers have been hereby subdued, Satan has been dispossessed of the hearts of his chief adherents, the kingdom of righteousness has been enlarged; and, by this very ordinance, our Joshua shall extend his victories to the most distant lands, and "will draw all men unto him."

* Luke xi. 22.

One family of the accursed city was saved. Rahab had faith in God, joined herself to his people, and therefore perished not with the unbelievers*. She was thenceforth incorporated with the Israelites, and was the root of an honourable household among them. This was an intimation of designs of mercy to the Gentile world; and it represents to us the readiness of the Saviour to pardon, and to admit into his Church, even those who have been of the vilest character. Their past iniquities, though most heinous, and their former connections with his avowed enemies, shall not disqualify them for his favour: for “the publicans and the harlots may go into the kingdom of God †.” Let them only submit, like Rahab, crediting the divine declarations; our Joshua will spare them, and number them among the true Israelites.

The fame of Joshua spread a terror through the land; and, though the inhabitants in general were most obdurate, and determined to oppose his arms, there were some who desired conditions of peace. The men of Gibeon made a league with him. They were then taken under his protection; and, whilst the neighbouring states were confederate against them, and aimed at their destruction, on account of their alliance with the Jewish Leader, he fought their battles for them, and secured them the victory ‡.—And will it not be for the interest and happiness of sinners, to seek the friendship of the Saviour, and to enter into a covenant with Him, even upon his own terms? Though the world reject his authority, and unite in

* Heb. xi. 31. † Matt. xxi. 31. ‡ Josh. ix & x.

persecuting

persecuting those who surrender unto Him, Jesus will receive them graciously, and will be a sufficient defence to them from the violence and rage of their associated enemies.

How vain is resistance to such a Commander! What nation or city was able to stand against Joshua? If we follow him from one encampment to another, we shall see all the kings of Canaan confounded, vanquished, and destroyed before him. How complete was the triumph, when “he called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war, which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings*!”—But you, who are enrolled in the armies of the faithful under the direction and support of our illustrious Head, shall obtain a conquest infinitely more glorious. Have you any cruel adversaries, who, for your attachment to Jesus, declare themselves against you? He, whom you serve, says, Fear them not. Look unto the end, when your most powerful opposers shall be made to bow down before you with unutterable anguish, and shall receive the sentence of condemnation from your mouth: for “the saints shall judge the world†.”—Does Satan, the avowed enemy of God and man, attempt to seduce, to perplex, and devour you? Resist him manfully, and “he will flee from you‡.” “Put on the whole armour of God;” and, while you fight with those weapons only, which are “mighty through God,” you may rejoice in the assurance, that “the God of peace

* Josh. x. 24.

† 1 Cor. vi. 2.

‡ James iv. 7.

shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly *.”—Do your inward lusts, with the most formidable and continual assaults, strive for the mastery, and threaten to overwhelm and destroy you? O seek the help of Jesus, who alone can subdue in you every wrong principle and affection. He will communicate such a measure of the sanctifying influence of his Spirit, that “Sin shall not have dominion over you †.” Under His care, then, you shall be supported in the conflict, and in the end you shall obtain a perfect and everlasting deliverance.

This is a victory, which *cannot be effected by the powers of reason, the refined arguments of human philosophy, or the strength of our own resolutions, but which Jesus bestows, which is to be acquired only by living in dependence on His grace and righteousness, and which, therefore, none but Believers can enjoy ‡. In order to gain this honourable conquest, we must “fight the good fight of faith.” And if we are engaged in the Christian warfare, let us beware, lest, by any perfidiousness, we provoke our Captain to withdraw from us, and to leave us exposed to the assaults of our enemies. For He is “jealous for his holy name,” and will refuse to go before us, if ever we should be induced, like Achan, to “take of the accursed thing.”

But many belong not to the armies of Israel. The worldly, the sensual, the proud, the covetous, whatever they may profess, follow not our Leader, but are “the adversaries of the Lord.” And what have

* Rom. xvi. 20.

† Rom. vi. 14.

‡ 1 John v. 4, 5.

you to expect at his hands? You have heard of the very terrible destruction, to which Joshua devoted the sinners of Canaan. But we want words to convey any adequate idea of the tremendous ruin, the "everlasting punishment," to which Jesus will condemn those who will not yield submission to his authority. You must either bow to the sceptre of his grace, and thus "make peace with him;" or else, "he will break you with a rod of iron, and dash you in pieces like a potter's vessel*."

We hasten to the close of this history, wherein we meet with another beautiful representation of the faithfulness and sufficiency of the Saviour, while we observe the Israelitish General fixing and establishing his people in their inheritance. It was the purpose of God from the beginning, and had been repeatedly declared to his servants in different ages, that the descendants of Abraham should possess the kingdom of Canaan,—the land which the Lord had "espied for them, flowing with milk and honey, and which was the glory of all lands †." Many previous measures were taken, in order to prepare for this event, but the completion of the design was reserved for Joshua. It was he, who, in a triumphant manner, conducted the hosts of Israel into that delightful country, who assigned to the various tribes their respective portions, and saw them settled in peace and prosperity around him. Then, when the whole scheme was accomplished, they were all required to testify, that "not one thing had failed of all the good things, which the Lord their God spake concern-

* Psal. ii. 9. † Ezek. xx. 6. Deut. xi. 10—12.

ing them." To Him, therefore, "who keepeth truth for ever," they were taught to ascribe the praise. "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them *."

In these several circumstances we discover a striking resemblance of the great plan of Salvation. The redeemed of the Lord shall "inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world:" For "it is their Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom †." Much has been done in various ways to forward the gracious design; but the full performance is intrusted to the care of Jesus. He is "the Captain of the Lord's hosts," who stands engaged to bring them to heaven. This was the object of his counsels from the beginning, nor will he leave his scheme unfinished. For the accomplishment of his purpose, he relinquished the throne of his glory, became obedient to the law, was made a curse, died, went down into the grave, and rose again: and, though he now reigns above, he is carrying on the same work, and, with a particular regard to it, he will continue to maintain universal dominion, "until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." Not one of his faithful followers shall fail of attaining "the promise of eternal inheritance;" for it is "reserved in heaven for them," and they "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ‡." His grace and truth are pledged

* Psal. xliv. 3.

† Matt. xxv. 34. Luke xii. 32.

‡ 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

for their present security, and for their final admission into "the joy of their Lord." They shall "sit with him in his throne, and shall reign for ever and ever*."

Canaan, we have seen, as the land of REST into which the Hebrews were conducted, typified the heavenly country, to which our expectations are raised. But how inferior, and how defective, the former, in comparison of the latter! The Rest of the Israelites was far from being complete, and was but of a short duration: and therefore one of a more excellent nature is provided for us by the Gospel. "For if Jesus (or Joshua) had given them Rest, (in the full sense of the word) then would he not afterward have spoken of another day †." But now "there remaineth a rest for the people of God:"—a Rest which may properly be called so, perfect in degree, and everlasting in continuance. How delightful the prospect! "It doth not yet appear, what we shall be; but we know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is ‡."

It will then be confessed, that the Lord "hath done all things well," in truth as well as mercy, that he hath fulfilled his Covenant, and that not one of all his precious promises has failed. Then, what acclamations of joy and gratitude will break forth from all the ransomed of the Lord, who shall come to Zion! But to whom will the praise be due? They will all cry out, in admiration of the grace of Jesus, "Unto

* Rev. iii. 21. xxii. 5. † Heb. iv. 8. ‡ 1 John iii. 2.
him

him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen *."

The subject is most interesting and claims the attention of different characters.

1. You, who are desirous of entering into his Rest, must enlist under the banners of this Captain, and "endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." For "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force †." The ensign is lifted up, wherever the Gospel is preached. Who are they, that flock unto it? "Who is on the Lord's side?" How strange is it, that so many are unwilling to join the armies of Israel! For, Who will not wish to be of their company, when their warfare is accomplished, and they take possession of their inheritance? Be persuaded, then, to comply with the gracious invitation of the Saviour, and cheerfully and cordially surrender up your all to him, saying, "Lord, I am thine; make me faithful in thy service, and lead me forward in whatever way thou plearest; only may I at last be crowned with victory in thy presence!"

2. You, who profess his name, and follow his standard, "quit yourselves like men, be strong." Continue to maintain the glorious conflict, which, severe as it may be, will shortly be ended, and will issue in your unspeakable felicity. Then "be not wearied, not faint in your minds." Behold the prize which is set before you; and let the prospect of "the glory, which

* Rev. i. 5, 6.

† Matt. xi. 12.

shall be revealed in you," animate your souls to the most vigorous exertions. If you tremble at the opposition of your enemies, you forget surely, that "the battle is the Lord's." It is dishonourable in you, who have such exalted expectations, to indulge a fear: and, by despondency of mind, you betray your Master's cause, and make all his adversaries to triumph. But, if you support your character, and preserve a steady courage, in a dependence on Him, under whom you fight, you shall not be ashamed at the last, but come off "more than conquerors," however weak and defenceless you may now seem. Even in this life, "One man of you shall chase a thousand: for the Lord your God, He it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you*." And hereafter, "you shall stand in great boldness, before the face of such as have afflicted you;—who shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strangeness of your salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for†."—Therefore

3. You, who are engaged in rebellion against the Lord's Anointed, who reject his grace and resist his government, are earnestly exhorted to consider your state. You say, "We will not have this man to reign over us‡: We ask you, then, Is not your conduct most base? For, to whom do you shew contempt, or refuse obedience? Is it not to Him, who has created and sustained you; to whom you are indebted for that very life, which you employ against

* Josh. xiii. 10.

† Wisd. v. 1, 2.

‡ Luke xix. 14.

him? Is it not to Him, who has been sending to you, from year to year, the offers of his mercy, and beseeching you to be saved? And is He to be despised and opposed?

But we inquire further, Are you not acting a dangerous part; as if you were obstinately bent upon your own ruin? For, while you rise up in rebellion against Christ, what do you but provoke Him to rise up against you? And what issue can you expect in this unequal contest? Be sure, that He will be true to his word: you shall stand at his bar; you shall hear that tremendous sentence, "Those mine enemies bring hither, and slay them before me." And Who shall deliver you out of his hand? O submit to him without reserve: Bow down at his feet, and intreat him to make peace with you. "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they, that put their trust in Him *."

* Psal. ii. 12.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

